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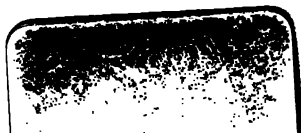
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HIDE AND SEEK.

HIDE AND SEEK.

BY

W. WILKIE COLLINS,

AUTHOR OF "ANTONINA," "RASIL," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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HIDE AND SEEK.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOX OF LETTERS.

THE first thing Mr. Marksman did when he got to his lodgings, was to fill and light his pipe. He then sat down on his bear-skins, dragged close to him the box he had brought from Dibbledean, and straightway fell into a long and profound meditation. Although the machinery of Mat's mind was constructed of very clumsy and barbaric materials; although book-learning had never oiled it, and wise men's talk had never quickened it; somehow it always contrived to work on—much as it was working now—gloomily and sullenly at one time, fiercely and cunningly at another, often revolving in awkward roundabout directions, often pausing with many a heavy check, and many a blundering entan-

glement; but, still, always pertinaciously arriving, sooner or later, at the practical results required of it. Solitude and Peril are stern schoolmasters, but they do their duty for good or evil, thoroughly with some men; and they had done it thoroughly, amid the rocks and wildernesses of the great American continent, with Mat.

Many a pipe did he empty and fill again, many a dark change passed over his heavy features, as he now pondered long and laboriously over every word of the dialogue that had just been held between himself and Zack. But not so much as five minutes out of all the time he thus consumed, was, in any true sense of the word, time wasted. He had sat down to his first pipe, resolved that, if any human means could compass it, he would find out how the young girl whom he had seen in Mr. Blyth's studio, had first come there, and who she really was. When he rose up at last, and put the pipe away to cool, he had thought the matter fairly out from beginning to end, had arrived at his conclusions, and had definitely settled his future plans.

Reflection had strengthened him in the resolution to follow his first impulse when he parted from Zack in the street, and begin the attempt to penetrate the

suspicious secret that hid from him and from every one the origin of Valentine's adopted child, by getting possession of the Hair Bracelet which he had seen laid away in the inner drawer of the bureau. As for any assignable reason for justifying him in even vaguely associating this Hair Bracelet with Madonna, he found it, to his own satisfaction, in the hints which had dropped from young Thorpe in reference to the strange words spoken by Mrs. Peckover in Mr. Blyth's hall—the suspicions resulting from these hints being also immensely strengthened, if not originally suggested, by certain recollections that occurred to him of the letter signed "Jane Holdsworth," and containing an enclosure of hair, which he had examined in the cattle-shed at Dibbledean.

According to that letter, a Hair Bracelet (easily recognisable, if still in existence, by comparing it with the hair enclosed in Jane Holdsworth's note), had once been the property of Mary Grice. According to what Zack had said, there was apparently some incomprehensible confusion and mystery in connection with a Hair Bracelet, and the young woman, whose extraordinary likeness to what Mary Grice had been in her girlhood, had at once excited

in his mind the momentous doubt which first urged him to the purpose he was now pursuing. Lastly, according to what he himself now knew, there was actually a Hair Bracelet lying in a sequestered place in the innermost drawer of Mr. Blyth's bureau—this latter fragment of evidence assuming in his mind, as has been already remarked, an undue significance and importance, in relation to the fragments preceding it, from his not knowing that hair bracelets are common enough to be found in every house where there are women in a position to wear any jewellery ornament at all.

Vague as they might be, the coincidences indicated above were sufficient to startle him at first—then to fill him with an eager, devouring curiosity—and then to suggest to him the uncertain and desperate course that he was now firmly resolved to follow. How he was to gain possession of the Hair Bracelet without Mr. Blyth's knowledge, and without exciting the slightest suspicion in the painter's family, he had not yet determined. But he was resolved to have it, he was perfectly unscrupulous as to means, and he felt certain beforehand of attaining his object. Whither, or to what excesses, that object might lead him, he never stopped and never cared to consider.

The awful face of the dead woman, as she was in her youth (now fixed for ever in his memory by the living copy of it that his own eyes had beheld), seemed to be driving him on swiftly into unknown darkness, to bring him out into unexpected light at the end. The influence which was thus at work in him was not to be questioned—it was to be obeyed.

His resolution in reference to the Hair Bracelet was not more firmly settled than his resolution to keep his real sensations on seeing Madonna, and the purpose which had grown out of them, a profound secret from young Thorpe, who was too warmly Mr. Blyth's friend to be trusted. Every word that Zack had let slip, had been of vital importance, hitherto; every word that might yet escape him, might be of the most precious use for future guidance. "If it's his fun and fancy," mused Mr. Marksman, "to go on thinking I'm sweet on the girl, let him think it. The more he thinks, the more he'll talk. All I've got to do is to *hold in*; and then he's sure to *let out*."

While schooling himself thus as to his future conduct towards Zack, he did not forget another person who was less close at hand certainly, but who

might also be turned to good account. Before he fairly decided on his plan of action, he debated with himself the propriety of returning to Dibbledean, and forcing from the old woman, Johanna Grice, more information than she had been willing to give him at their first interview. But, on reflection, he considered that it was better to leave this as a resource to be tried, in case of the failure of his first experiment with the Hair Bracelet. One look at that—one close comparison of the hair it was made of, with the surplus hair which had not been used by the jeweller, in Mary Grice's bracelet, and which had been returned to her in her friend's letter, was all he wanted in the first place; for this would be enough to clear up every present uncertainty and suspicion connected with the ornament in the drawer of Mr. Blyth's bureau.

These were mainly the resolutions to which his long meditation had now crookedly and clumsily conducted him. His next immediate business was to examine those letters in the box he had brought from Dibbledean, which he had hitherto not opened; and also to possess himself of the enclosure of hair, in the letter to "Mary Grice," so that he might have it always about him ready for any emergency.

Before he opened the box, however, he took a quick impatient turn or two up and down his miserable little room. Not once, since he had set forth to return to his own country, and to the civilisation from which, for more than twenty years, he had been an outcast, had he felt (to use his favourite expression) that he was "his own man again," until now. A thrill of the old, breathless, fierce suspense of his days of deadly peril ran through him, as he now thought on the forbidden secret into which he was about to pry, and for the discovery of which he was ready to dare any hazard and use any means. "It goes through and through me, a'most like dodging for life again among the bloody Indians," muttered Mat to himself, as he trod restlessly to and fro in his cage of a room, rubbing all the while at the scars on his face, as his way was when any new excitement got the better of him.

At the very moment when this thought was rising ominously in Mr. Marksman's mind, Valentine was expounding anew the whole scope and object of "Art-Mystic," as pictorially exemplified in his "Columbus," to a fresh circle of admiring spectators—while his wife was interpreting to Madonna above stairs, Zack's wildest jokes about his friend's

love-stricken condition ; and all three were laughing gaily at a caricature, which he was maliciously drawing for them, of "poor old Mat," in the character of a scalped Cupid of the backwoods. Even the little minor globe of each man's social sphere has its Antipodes-Points ; and when it is all bright sunshine in one part of the miniature world, it is all pitch darkness, at the very same moment, in another.

Mr. Marksman's face had grown suddenly swarthier than ever, while he walked across his room, and said those words to himself which have just been recorded. It altered again, though, in a minute or two, and turned once more to the cold clay-colour which had overspread it in the hosier's shop at Dibbledean, as he returned to his bear-skins and opened the box that had belonged to "Mary Grice."

He took out first the letter with the enclosure of hair, and placed it carefully in the breast pocket of his coat. He next searched a moment or two for the letter superscribed and signed by Johanna Grice ; and, having found it, placed it on one side of him, on the floor. After this he paused a moment, looking into the box with a curious, scowling sadness on his face ; while his hand vacantly stirred hither and

thither, the different objects that lay about among the papers—the gaily-bound album, the lace-collar, the dried flower-leaves, and the other little womanly possessions which had once belonged to Mary Grice.

Then he began to collect together all the letters in the box. Having got them into his hands—some tied up in a packet, some loose—he spread them out before him on his lap, first drawing up an end of one of the bear-skins over his legs for them to lie on conveniently. He began by examining the directions. They were all addressed to “Mary Grice,” in the same clear, careful, sharply-shaped handwriting. Though they were letters in form, they proved to be only notes in substance, when he opened them: the writing, in some, not extending to more than four or five lines. At least fifteen or twenty were, for example, expressed, with unimportant variations, in this form:—

“MY DEAREST MARY,—Pray try all you can to meet me to-morrow evening at the usual place. I have been waiting and longing for you in vain, to-day. Only think of *me*, love, as I am now, and always, thinking of *you*; and I know you will come. Ever and only yours. A.C.”

All these notes were signed in the same way, merely with initial letters. They contained nothing in the shape of a date, except the day of the week on which they had been written; and they had evidently been delivered by some private means,—for there did not appear to be a post-mark on any of them. One after another Mat opened, and glanced at them—then tossed them aside into a heap. He pursued this employment quietly and methodically; but as he went on with it, a strange look flashed into his eyes from time to time, giving to them a certain sinister, and almost savage, brightness which altered very remarkably the whole natural expression of his face.

Other letters, somewhat longer than the note already quoted, fared no better at his hands. Dry leaves dropped out of some as he threw them aside; and little water-colour drawings of rare flowers fluttered out of others. Hard botanical names which he could not spell through, and descriptions of plants which he could not understand, occurred here and there in postscripts and detached passages of the longer letters. But still, whether long or short, they bore no signature but the initials “A. C. ;” still the dates afforded no information of

the year, month or place in which they had been written ; and still Mr. Marksman quietly and quickly tossed them aside one after the other, without so much as a word or a sigh escaping him, but with that sinister brightness flashing into his eyes from time to time. Out of the whole number of the letters, there were only two that he read more than once through, and then pondered over anxiously, before he threw them from him like the rest.

The first of the two was expressed thus :—

“I shall bring the dried ferns and the Passion Flower for your Album with me this evening. You cannot imagine, dearest, how happy and how vain I feel at having made you as enthusiastic a botanist as I am myself. Since you have taken an interest in my favourite pursuit, it has been more exquisitely delightful to me than any words can express. I believe that I never really knew how to touch tender leaves tenderly until now, when I gather them with the knowledge that they are all to be shown to *you*, and all to be placed in your own dear hand.

“Do you know, my own love, I thought I detected an alteration in you yesterday evening? I never saw you so serious. And then your attention often

wandered, and, besides, you looked at me once or twice quite strangely, Mary—I mean strangely, because your colour seemed to be coming and going constantly without any imaginable reason. I really fancied, as I walked home—and I fancy still—that you had something to say, and were afraid to say it. Surely, love, you can have no secrets from me!—But we shall meet to night, and then you will tell me everything (will you not?) without reserve. Farewell, dearest, till seven o'clock.”

Mat slowly read the second paragraph of this letter twice over, abstractedly twisting about his great bristly whiskers between his finger and thumb. There was evidently something in the few lines which he was thus poring over, that half saddened, half perplexed him. Whatever the difficulty was, he gave it up, and went on doggedly to the next letter, which was an exception to the rest of the collection, for it had a post-mark on it. He had failed to notice this, on looking at the outside; but he detected directly on glancing at the inside that it was dated differently from those which had gone before it. Under the day of the week was written the word: “London”—noting which, he began to read the

letter with some appearance of anxiety. It ran thus :—

“I write, my dearest love, in the greatest possible agitation and despair. All the hopes I felt, and expressed to you, that my absence would not last more than a few days, and that I should not be obliged to journey farther from Dibbledean than London, have been entirely frustrated. I am absolutely compelled to go to Germany, and may be away as long as three or four months. You see, I tell you the worst at once, Mary, because I know your courage and high spirit, and feel sure that you will bear up bravely against this unforeseen parting, for both our sakes. How glad I am that I gave you my hair for your Bracelet, when I did ; and that I got yours in return ! It will be such a consolation to both of us to have our keep-sakes to look at now.

“If it only rested with *me* to go or not, no earthly consideration should induce me to take this journey. But the rights and interests of others are concerned in my setting forth ; and I must, therefore, depart at the expense of my own wishes, and my own happiness. I go this very day, and can only steal a few

minutes to write to you. My pens hurries over the paper without stopping an instant—I hope I write intelligibly; but I am so agitated that I hardly know what I am saying to you.

“If anything, dearest Mary, could add to my sense of the misfortune of being obliged to leave you, it would be the apprehension, which I now feel, that I may have ignorantly offended you, or that something has happened which you don’t like to tell me. Ever since I noticed, ten days ago, that little alteration in your manner, I have been afraid you had something on your mind that you were unwilling to confide to me. The very last time we saw each other, I thought you had been crying; and I am sure you looked away uneasily, whenever our eyes met. What is it? Do relieve my anxiety by telling me what it is in your first letter! The moment I get to the other side of the Channel, I will send you word where to direct to. I will write constantly—mind you write constantly too. Love me, and remember me always, till I return, never, I hope, to leave you again.—A.C.”

Over this letter, Mat meditated long before he quietly cast it away among the rest. When he

had at last thrown it from him there remained only three more to examine. They proved to be notes of no consequence, and had been evidently written at an earlier period than the letters he had just read. After hastily looking them over, he searched carefully all through the box, but no papers of any sort remained in it. That hurried letter, with its abrupt announcement of the writer's departure from England, was the latest in date—the last of the series !

After he had made this discovery, he sat for a little while vacantly gazing out of window. His sense of the useless result to which the search he had been prosecuting had led him thus far, seemed to have robbed him of half his energy already. He looked once or twice at the letter superscribed by Johanna Grice, mechanically reading along the line on the cover :—"Justification of my conduct towards my niece,"—but not attempting to examine what was written inside. It was only after a long interval of hesitation and delay that he at last roused himself. "I must sweep these things out of the way, and read all what I've got to read before Zack comes in," said he to himself, gathering up the letters in the heap at his feet, and thrusting them all back again together, with an oath, into the box.

He listened carefully once or twice after he had shut down the lid, and while he was tying the cords over it, to ascertain whether his wild young friend was opening the street-door yet, or not. How short a time he had passed in Zack's company, yet how thoroughly well he knew him, not as to his failings only, but as to his merits besides! How wisely he foreboded that his careless, social, boisterous fellow-lodger would infallibly turn against him as an enemy, and expose him without an instant's hesitation, if young Thorpe got any hint of his first experimental scheme for discovering poor Mr. Blyth's anxiously-treasured secret by underhand and treacherous means! Mat's cunning had proved an invaluable resource to him on many a critical occasion already; but he had never been more admirably served by it than now, when it taught him to be cautious of betraying himself to Zack.

For the present there seemed to be no danger of interruption. He corded up the box at his leisure, concealed it in its accustomed place, took his brandy-bottle from the cupboard, opened Johanna Grice's letter—and still there was no sound of any one entering, in the passage down-stairs. Before he began to read, he drank some of the spirit from the

neck of the bottle. Was there some inexplicable dread stealing over him at the mere prospect of examining the contents of this one solitary letter? It seemed as if there was. His finger trembled so, when he tried to guide himself by it along each successive line of the cramped writing which he was now attempting to decipher, that he had to take a second dram to steady it. And, when he at length fairly began to examine the letter, he did not pursue his occupation either as quietly or as quickly as he had followed it before. Sometimes he read a line or two aloud, sometimes he overlooked several sentences, and went on to another part of the long narrative—now growling out angry comments on what he was reading, and now dashing down the paper impatiently on his knees, with fierce outbursts of oaths, which he had picked up in the terrible swearing-school of the Californian gold mines.

He began, however, with perfect regularity at the proper part of the letter; sitting as near to the window as he could, and slanting the closely written page before him, so as to give himself the full benefit of all the afternoon light that still flowed into the room.

CHAPTER II.

JOHANNA GRICE'S NARRATIVE.

“I INTEND this letter to be read after my death, and I purpose calling it plainly a Justification of my conduct towards my Niece. Not because I think my conduct wants any excuse—for, except on one point, my conscience has always been tranquil on that head—but because others, ignorant of my true motives, may think that my actions want justifying, and may wickedly condemn me, unless I make some such statement in my own defence as the present. There may still be living one member of my late brother's family, whose voice would, I feel sure, be raised against me for what I have done. I could wish that this person, if still spared, might one day be able to read attentively what is here written; for it is addressed to the hasty and malicious accuser, as well as to the deliberate and impartial

enquirer. The relation to whom I refer has been ——”

(Here Mat, who had read carefully thus far, grew impatient, and growling out some angry words guided himself hastily down the letter with his finger till he arrived at the second paragraph.)

“ —— It was in the April of 1827 that the villain who was the ruin of my niece, and the dishonour of the once respectable family to which she belonged, first came to Dibbledean. He took the little four room cottage called Jay’s Cottage, which was then to be let furnished, and which stands out of the town about a quarter of a mile down Church-lane. He called himself Mr. Carr, and the few letters that came to him were directed to ‘Arthur Carr, Esq.’ He was quite a young man,—I should say not more than four or five and twenty—very quiet mannered, and delicate, or rather effeminate looking, as I thought; for he wore his hair quite long over his shoulders, in the foreign way, and had a clear, soft complexion, almost like a woman’s. Though he appeared to be a gentleman, he always kept out of the way of making acquaintances among the respectable families about Dibbledean. He had no friends of his own to come and see him that I heard

of, except an old gentleman who might have been his father, and who came once or twice. His own account of himself was, that he came to Jay's Cottage for quiet, and retirement, and study; but he was very reserved, and would let nobody make up to him until the miserable day when he and my brother Joshua, and then my niece Mary, all got acquainted together.

"Before I go to anything else, I must say first, that Mr. Carr was what they call a botanist. Whenever it was fine, he was always out of doors, gathering bits of leaves, which it seems he carried home in a tin case, and dried, and kept by him. He hired a gardener for the bit of ground round about Jay's Cottage; and the man told me once, that his master knew more about flowers and how to grow them than anybody he ever met with. Mr. Carr used to make little pictures, too, of flowers and leaves set together in patterns. These things were thought very odd amusements for a young man to take up with; but he was as fond of them as others of his age might be of hunting or shooting. He brought down many books with him, and read a great deal; but, from all that I heard, he spent more time over his flowers and his botany than anything else.

“ We had, at that time, the two best shops in Dibbledean. Joshua sold hosiery, and I carried on a good dress-making and general millinery business. Both our shops were under the same roof, with a partition wall between. One day, Mr. Carr came into Joshua’s shop, and wanted something which my brother had not got as ready to hand as the common things that the townspeople generally bought. Joshua begged him to sit down for a few minutes; but Mr. Carr (the parlour door at the bottom of the shop being left open) happened to look into the garden, which he could see very well through the window, and said that he would like to wait there, and look at the flowers, while what he wanted was being got for him. Joshua was only too glad to have his garden taken such notice of, by a gentleman who was a botanist; so he showed his customer in there, and then went up into the warehouse to look for what was wanted.

“ My niece, Mary, worked in my part of the house, along with the other young women. The room they used to be in looked into the garden; and from the window my niece must have seen Mr. Carr, and must have slipped down stairs (I not being in the way just then) to peep at the strange gentleman—

or, more likely, to make believe she was accidentally walking in the garden, and so get noticed by him. All I know is, that when I came up into the work-room and found she was not there, and looked out of the window, I saw her, and Joshua, and Mr. Carr all standing together on the grass plot, the strange gentleman talking to her quite intimate, with a flower in his hand. I called out to her to come back to her work directly; and she looked up at me, smiling in her bold impudent way, and said:—‘Father has told me I may stop and learn what this gentleman is so kind as to teach me about my geraniums.’ After that, I could say nothing more before the stranger; and when he was gone, and she came back triumphing, and laughing, and singing about the room, more like a mad play-actress than a decent young woman, I kept quiet and bore with her provocation. But I went down to my brother Joshua the same day, and talked to him seriously, and warned him that she ought to be kept stricter, and never let to have her own way, and offered to keep a strict hand over her myself, if he would only support me properly. But he put me off with careless, jesting words, which he learned to repent of bitterly afterwards.

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outset, as perversely towards me as usual, in respect to Mr. Carr. It had flattered her pride to be noticed and bowed to, just as if she was a born lady, by a gentleman, and a customer at the shop. And the very same evening, at tea-time, she undid before my face the whole effect of the good advice I had been giving her father. What with jumping on his knee, kissing him, tying and untying his cravat, sticking flowers in his button-hole, and going on altogether more like a child than a grown-up young woman, she wheedled him into promising that he would take her next Sunday to see Mr. Carr's garden; for it seems the gentleman had invited them to look at his flowers. I had tried my best, when I heard it, to persuade my brother not to accept the invitation, and let her scrape acquaintance with a stranger under her father's own nose; but all that I could say was useless now. She had got the better of me, and when I put in my word, she had her bold laugh and her light answer ready to insult me with directly. Her father said he wondered I was not amused at her high spirits. I shook my head, but said nothing in return. Poor man! he lived to see where her 'high spirits' led her to.

"On the Sunday, after church, they went to

Mr. Carr's. Though my advice was set at defiance in this way, I determined to persevere in keeping a stricter watch over my niece than ever. I felt that the maintaining of the credit and reputation of the family rested with me, and I determined that I would try my best to uphold our good name. It is some little comfort to me, after all that has happened, to remember that I did my utmost to carry out this resolution. The blame of our dishonour lies not at my door. I disliked and distrusted Mr. Carr from the very first; and I tried hard to make others as suspicious of him as I was. But all I could say, and all I could do, availed nothing against the wicked cunning of my niece. Watch and restrain her as I might, she was sure——"

(Once more Mat broke off abruptly in the middle of a sentence. This time, however, it was to strike a light. The brief day of winter was fast fading out—the coming darkness seemed to be deepening palpably over the pages of Johanna Grice's letter. When he had lit his candle, and had sat down to read again, he lost his place, and, not having patience to look for it carefully, went on at once with the first lines that happened to strike his eye.)

"Things were now come, then, to this pass, that

I felt certain she was in the habit of meeting him in secret ; and yet I could not prove it to my brother's satisfaction. I had no help that I could call in to make me equal to cope with the diabolical cunning that was used to deceive me. To set other people to watch them, when I could not, would only have been spreading through Dibbledean the very scandal that I was most anxious to avoid. As for Joshua, his infatuation made him deaf to all that I could urge. He would see nothing suspicious in the fondness Mary had suddenly taken for Botany, and drawing flowers. He let Mr. Carr lend her paintings to copy from, just as if they had known each other all their lives. Next to his blind trust in his daughter, because he was so fond of her, was his blind trust in this stranger, because the gentleman's manners were so quiet and kind, and because he sent us presents of expensive flowers to plant in our garden. He would not authorise me to open Mary's letters, or to forbid her ever to walk out alone. He even told me once that I did not know how to make proper allowances for young people. Allowances ! I knew my niece better, and my duty as one of an honest family better, than to make allowances for such conduct as hers. I kept the tightest hand

over her that I could. I advised her, argued with her, ordered her, portioned out her time for her, watched her, warned her, told her in the plainest terms that she should not deceive *me*—she or her gentleman! I was honest and open, and said I disapproved so strongly of the terms she kept up with Mr. Carr, that if ever it lay in my power to cut short their acquaintance together, I would most assuredly do it. I even told her plainly that if she once got into mischief, it would then be too late to reclaim her; and she answered in her reckless, sluttish way, that if ever she did get into mischief it would be nothing but my aggravation that would drive her to it; and that she believed her father's kindness would never find it too late to reclaim her again. This is only one specimen of the usual insolence and wickedness of all her replies to me."

(As he finished this paragraph, Mat dashed the letter down angrily on his knee; and cursed the writer of it with some of those gold-digger's imprecations which it had been his misfortune to hear but too often in the past days of his Californian wanderings. It was evidently only by placing considerable constraint upon himself that he now refrained from crumpling up the letter and throwing it from him in

disgust. However, he spread it out flat before him once more—looked first at one paragraph, then at another; but did not read them; hesitated—and then irritably turned over the leaf of paper before him, and began at a new page.)


“When I told Joshua generally what I had observed, and particularly what I myself had seen and heard on the evening in question, he seemed at last a little staggered, and sent for my niece to insist on an explanation. When he repeated to her what I had mentioned to him, she flung her arms round his neck, looked first at me and then at him, burst out sobbing and crying, and so got from bad to worse till she had a sort of fit. I was not at all sure that this might not be one of her tricks; but it frightened her father so that he forgot himself, and threw all the blame on me, and said my prudery and conspiring had tormented and frightened the poor girl out of her wits. After being insulted in this way, of course the only thing I could do was to leave the room, and let her have it all her own way with him.

“It was now the autumn, the middle of September; and I was at my wit’s end to know what I ought to think and do next—when Mr. Carr left

Dibbledean. He had been away once or twice before, in the summer, but only for a day or two at a time. On this occasion, a letter came from him to my niece. He had never written to her when he was away in the summer; so I thought this looked like a longer absence than usual, and I determined to take advantage of it to try if I could not break off the intimacy between them, in case it went the length of any more letter-writing. I most solemnly declare, and could affirm on oath if necessary, that in spite of all I had seen and all I suspected for these many months, I had not the most distant idea of the wickedness that had really been committed. I thank God I was not well enough versed in the ways of sin to be as sharp in coming to the right conclusion as other women might have been in my situation. I only believed that the way she was going on *might* be fatal to her at some future time; and, acting on that belief, I thought myself justified in using any means in my power to stop her in her present course. I therefore resolved with myself that if Mr. Carr wrote again, she should get none of his letters; and I knew her passionate and proud disposition well enough to know that if she could once be brought to think herself neglected by

him, she would break off all intercourse with him, if ever he came back, immediately.

“I thought myself perfectly justified, standing towards her as I did in the place of a mother, and having only her good at heart, in taking these measures. On that head my conscience is still quite easy. I cannot mention what the plan was that I now adopted, without seriously, if not fatally, compromising a living person. All I can say is, that every letter from Mr. Carr to our house, passed into my hands only, and was by me committed to the flames, unread. These letters were at first all for my niece ; but towards the end of the year two came, at different intervals, directed to my brother. I distrusted the cunning of the writer and the weakness of Joshua ; and I put both these letters into the fire, unread like the rest. After that, no more came ; and Mr. Carr never returned to Jay’s Cottage. In reference to this part of my narrative, therefore, I have only now to add, before proceeding to the miserable confession of our family dishonour, that I never afterwards saw, and only once heard of the man who tempted my niece to commit the deadly sin which was her ruin in this world, and will be her ruin in the next.”




(Mat was evidently getting more and more interested in the letter. Although, when he had first examined it, he had read the last sentence, by chance, in the shed at Dibbledean, he read it again carefully now—paused a moment—then resolutely went through it once more. After he had done this, he became suddenly very still and thoughtful. His brow darkened heavily, and that fierce brightness which had been flashing in his eyes a short time back, lightened up again in them, when he proceeded with the letter.)

“I must now return to what happened from my burning of the letters. When my niece found that week after week passed, and she never heard from Mr. Carr, she fretted about it much more than I had fancied she would. And Joshua unthinkingly made her worse by wondering, in her presence, at the long absence of the gentleman of Jay’s Cottage. My brother was a man who could not abide his habits being broken in on. He had been in the habit of going on certain evenings to Mr. Carr’s (and, I grieve to say, often taking his daughter with him) to fetch the London paper, to take back drawings of flowers, and to let my niece bring away new ones to copy. And now, he fidgetted, and was restless, and discon-

tented (as much as so easy-tempered a man could be) at not taking his usual walks to Jay's Cottage. This, as I have said, made his daughter worse. She fretted and fretted, and cried in secret, as I could tell by her eyes, till she grew to be quite altered. Now and then, the angry fit that I had expected to see, came upon her ; but it always went away again in a manner not at all natural to one of her passionate disposition. All this time, she led me as miserable a life as she could ; provoking and thwarting, and insulting me at every opportunity. I believe she suspected me, in the matter of the letters. But I had taken my measures so as to make discovery impossible ; and I determined to wait, and be patient and persevering, and get the better of her and her wicked fancy for Mr. Carr, just as I had made up my mind to do.

“At last, as the winter drew on, she altered so much, and got such a strange look in her face, which never seemed to leave it, that Joshua became alarmed, and said he must send for the doctor. She seemed to be half frightened out of her wits at the mere thought of it ; and declared, quite passionately, all of a sudden, that she had no want of a doctor, and would see none and answer the questions of none.



This astonished me as well as Joshua ; and when he asked me privately what I thought was the matter with her, I was obliged of course to tell him the truth, and say I believed that she was almost out of her mind with love for Mr. Carr. For the first time in his life, my brother flew into a violent rage with me. I suspect he was furious with his own conscience for reminding him, as it must have done then, how foolishly over-indulgent he had been towards her, and how carelessly he had allowed her, as well as himself, to get acquainted with a person out of her own station, whom it was not proper for either of them to know. I said nothing of this to him at the time : he was not fit to listen to it—and still less fit, even had I been willing to confide it to him, to hear what the plan was which I had adopted for working her cure.

“ As the weeks went on, and she still fretted in secret, and still looked unlike herself, I began to doubt whether this very plan, from which I had hoped so much, would after all succeed. I was sorely distressed in my mind, at times, as to what I ought to do next ; and began indeed to feel the difficulty getting too much for me, just when it was drawing on fast to its shocking and shameful end. We were

then close upon Christmas time. Joshua had got his shop-bills well forward for sending out, and was gone to London on business, as was customary with him at this season of the year. I expected him back, as usual, a day or two before Christmas Day.


“For a little while past, I had noticed some change in my niece. Ever since my brother had talked about sending for the doctor, she had altered a little, in the way of going on more regularly with her work, and pretending (though she made but a bad pretence of it) that there was nothing ailed her, her object being, of course, to make her father easier about her in his mind. The change, however, to which I now refer, was of another sort, and only affected her manner towards me, and her manner of dressing herself. When we were alone together, now, I found her conduct quite altered. She spoke soft to me, and looked humble, and did what work I set her without idleness or murmuring; and once, even made as if she wanted to kiss me. But I was on my guard—suspecting that she wanted to entrap me, with her wheedling ways, into letting out something about Mr. Carr’s having written, and my having burned his letters. It was at this time also, and a little before it, that I noticed the alteration in her dress.

She fell into wearing her things in a slovenly way, and sitting at home in her shawl, on account of feeling cold, she said, when I reprimanded her for such untidyness.

“I don’t know how long things might have lasted like this, or what the end might have been, if events had gone on in their own way. But the dreadful truth made itself known at last suddenly, by a sort of accident. She had a quarrel with one of the other young women in the dressmaking-room, named Ellen Gough, about a certain disreputable friend of hers, one Jane Holdsworth, whom I had once employed, and had dismissed for impertinence and slatternly conduct. Ellen Gough having, it seems, been provoked past all bearing by something my niece said to her, came away to me in a passion, and in so many words told me the awful truth, that my brother’s only daughter had disgraced herself and her family for ever. The unutterable horror and misery of that moment is present to me now, at this distance of time. The shock I then received struck me down at once: I never have recovered from it, and I never shall.

“In the first distraction of the moment, I must have done or said something down stairs, where I

was, which must have warned the wretch in the room above that I had discovered her infamy. I remember going to her bed-chamber, and finding the door locked, and hearing her refuse to open it. After that, I must have fainted, for I found myself, I did not know how, in the work-room, and Ellen Gough giving me a bottle to smell to. With her help, I got into my own room; and there I fainted away dead again. When I came to, I went once more to my niece's bed-chamber. The door was now open; and there was a bit of paper on the looking-glass directed to my brother Joshua. She was gone from the honest house that her sin had defiled—gone from it for ever. She had written only a few scrawled wild lines to her father, but in them there was full acknowledgment of her crime, and a confession that it was the villain Carr who had caused her to commit it. She said she was gone to take her shame from our doors. She entreated that no attempt might be made to trace her, for she would die rather than return to disgrace her family, and her father in his old age. After this came some lines, which seemed to have been added, on second thoughts, to what went before. I do not remember the exact words; but the sense referred, shamelessly




enough as I thought, to the child that was afterwards born, and to her resolution, if it came into the world alive, to suffer all things for its sake.

“It was at first some relief to know that she was gone. The dreadful exposure and degradation that threatened us, seemed to be delayed at least by her absence. On questioning Ellen Gough, I found that the other two young women who worked under me, and who were most providentially absent on a Christmas visit to their friends, were not acquainted with my niece’s infamous secret. Ellen had accidentally discovered it; and she had, therefore, been obliged to confess to Ellen, and put trust in her. Everybody else in the house had been as successfully deceived as I had been myself. When I heard this, I began to have some hope that our family disgrace might remain unknown in the town.

“I wrote to my brother, not telling him what had happened, but only begging him to come back instantly. It was the bitterest part of all the bitter misery, I then suffered, to think of what I had now to tell Joshua, and of what dreadful extremities his daughter’s ruin might drive him to. I strove hard to prepare myself for the time of coming trial; but what really took place was worse than my worst

forebodings. When my brother heard the shocking news I had to tell, and saw the scrawled paper she had left for him, he spoke and acted as if he was out of his mind. It was only charitable, only fair to his previous character, to believe, as I then believed, that distress had actually driven him, for the time, out of his senses. He declared that he would go away instantly and search for her, and set others seeking for her too. He said, he even swore, that he would bring her back home the moment he found her; that he would succour her in her misery, and accept her penitence, and shelter her under his roof the same as ever, without so much as giving a thought to the scandal and disgrace that her infamous situation would inflict on her family. He even wrested Scripture from its true meaning to support him in what he said, and in what he was determined to do. And, worst of all, the moment he heard how it was that I had discovered his daughter's crime, he insisted that Ellen Gough should be turned out of the house: he declared, in such awful language as I had never believed it possible he could utter, that she should not sleep under his roof that night. It was hopeless to attempt to appease him. He put her out at the door



with his own hand that very day. She was an excellent and a regular workwoman, but sullen and revengeful when her temper was once roused. By the next morning our disgrace was known all over Dibbledean.

"There was only one more degradation now to be dreaded; and that it sickened me to think of. I knew Joshua well enough to know that if he found the lost wretch he was going in search of, he would absolutely and certainly bring her home again. I had been born in our house at Dibbledean; my mother before me had been born there; our family had lived in the old place, honestly and respectably, without so much as a breath of ill report ever breathing over them, for generations and generations back. When I thought of this, and then thought of the bare possibility that an abandoned woman might soon be admitted, and a bastard child born, in the house where so many of my relations had lived virtuously and died righteously, I resolved that the day, when *she* set her foot on our threshold, should be the day when *I* left my home and my birthplace for ever.

"While I was in this mind, Joshua came to me—as determined in his way as I secretly was in mine—to ask if I had any suspicions about what direction

she had taken. All the first enquiries after her that he had made in Dibbledean, had, it seems, given him no information whatever. I said I had no positive knowledge (which was strictly true), but told him I suspected she was gone to London. He asked why? I answered, because I believed she was gone to look after Mr. Carr; and said that I remembered his letter to her (the first and only one she received) had a London post-mark upon it. We could not find this letter at the time: the hiding-place she had for it, and for all the others she left behind her, was not discovered till years after, when the house was repaired for the people who bought our business. Joshua, however, having nothing better to guide himself by, and being resolved to begin seeking her at once, said my suspicion was a likely one; and went away to London by that night's coach, to see what he could do, and to get advice from his lawyers about how to trace her.

“This, which I have been just relating, is the only part of my conduct, in the time of our calamity, which I now think of with an uneasy conscience. When I told Joshua I suspected she was gone to London I was not telling him the truth. I knew nothing certainly about where she was gone; but I

did assuredly suspect that she had turned her steps exactly in the contrary direction to London—that is to say, far out Bangbury way. She had been constantly asking all sorts of questions of Ellen Gough, who told me of it, about roads, and towns, and people in that distant part of the country : and this was my only reason for thinking she had taken herself away in that direction. Though it was but a matter of bare suspicion at the best, still I deceived my brother as to my real opinion when he asked it of me : and this was a sin which I now humbly and truly repent of. But the thought of helping him, by so little even as the chance assistance of a likely guess, to bring our infamy home to our own doors, by actually bringing his degraded daughter back with him into my presence, in the face of the whole town—this thought, I say, was too much for me. I believed that the day when she crossed our threshold again would be the day of my death, as well as the day of my farewell to home ; and under that conviction I concealed from Joshua what my real opinion was.

“I deserved to suffer for this ; and I did suffer for it. Two or three days after the lonely Christmas Day that I passed in utter solitude at our house in

Dibbledean, I received a letter from Joshua's lawyer in London, telling me to come up and see my brother immediately, for he was taken dangerously ill. In the course of his enquiries (which he would pursue himself, although the lawyers, who knew better what ought to be done, were doing their utmost to help him), he had been misled by some false information, and had been robbed and ill-used in some place near the river, and then turned out at night in a storm of snow and sleet. It is useless now to write about what I suffered from this fresh blow, or to speak of the awful time I passed by his bed-side in London. Let it be enough to say, that he escaped out of the very jaws of death; and that it was the end of February before he was well enough to be taken home to Dibbledean.

“He soon got better in his own air—better as to his body, but his mind was in a sad way. Every morning, he used to ask if any news of Mary had come? and when he heard there was none, he used to sigh, and then hardly say another word, or so much as hold up his head, for the rest of the day. At one time, he showed a little anxiety now and then about a letter reaching its destination, and being duly received; peevishly refusing to mention

to me even so much as the address on it. But I guessed who it had been sent to easily enough, when his lawyers told me that he had written it in London, and had mentioned to them that it was going to some place beyond the seas. He soon seemed to forget this though, and to forget everything, except his regular question about Mary, which he sometimes repeated in his dazed condition, even after I had broken it to him that she was dead.

“The news of her death came in the March of the new year 1828. All inquiries in London had failed up to that time in discovering the remotest trace of her. In Dibbledean we knew she could not be; and elsewhere Joshua was now in no state to search for her himself, or to have any clear notions of instructing others in what direction to make inquiries for him. But in this month of March, I saw in the Bangbury paper (which circulates in our county besides its own) an advertisement calling on the friends of a young woman who had just died and left behind her an infant, to come forward and identify the body, and take some steps in respect to the child. The description was very full and particular, and did not admit of a doubt, to any one who knew her as

well as I did, that the young woman referred to was my guilty and miserable niece. My brother was in no condition to be spoken to in this difficulty; so I determined to act for myself. I sent by a person I could depend upon, money enough to bury her decently, in Bangbury churchyard, putting no name or date to my letter. There was no law to oblige me to do more, and more I was determined not to do. As to the child that was the offspring of her sin; it was the infamous father's business to support and own it, and not mine.

"When people in the town, who knew of our calamity, and had seen the advertisement, talked to me of it, I admitted nothing, and denied nothing — I simply refused to speak with them on the subject of what had happened in our family.

"Having endeavoured to provide in this way for the protection of my brother and myself, against the meddling and impertinence of idle people, I believed that I had now suffered the last of the many bitter trials which had assailed me as the consequences of my niece's guilt: I was mistaken: the cup of my affliction was not yet full. One day, hardly a fortnight after I had sent the burial

money anonymously to Bangbury, our servant came to me and said there was a stranger at the door who wished to see my brother, and was so bent on it that he would take no denial. I went down, and found waiting on the door-steps a very respectable-looking, middle-aged man, whom I had certainly never set eyes on before in my life.

"I told him that I was Joshua's sister, and that I managed my brother's affairs for him, in the present state of his health. The stranger only answered, that he was very anxious to see Joshua himself. I did not choose to expose the helpless condition into which my brother's intellects had fallen, to a person of whom I knew nothing; so I merely said, the interview he wanted was out of the question, but that, if he had any business with Mr. Grice, he might, for the reasons I had already given, mention it to me. He hesitated, and smiled, and said he was very much obliged to me; and then, making as if he was going to step in, added that I should probably be able to appreciate the friendly nature of the business on which he came, when he informed me that he was confidentially employed by Mr. Arthur Carr. The instant he spoke it, I felt the name go to my heart like a

knife—then my indignation got the better of me. I told him to tell Mr. Carr that the miserable creature whom his villainy had destroyed, had fled away from her home, had died away from her home, and was buried away from her home ; and, with that, I shut the door in his face. My agitation, and a sort of terror that I could not account for, so overpowered me that I was obliged to lean against the wall of the passage, and was unable, for some minutes to stir a step towards going up stairs. As soon as I got a little better, and began to think about what had taken place, a doubt came across me as to whether I might not have acted wrong. I remembered that Joshua's lawyers in London had made it a great point that this Mr. Carr should be traced ; and though, since then, our situation had been altered by my niece's death, still I felt uncertain and uneasy—I could hardly tell why—at what I had done. It was as if I had taken some responsibility on myself which ought not to have been mine. In short, I ran back to the door and opened it, and looked up and down the street. It was too late : the strange man was out of sight, and I never set eyes on him again.

“This was in March, 1828, the same month in

which the advertisement appeared. I am particular in repeating the date, because it marks the time of the last information I have to give in connection with the disgraceful circumstances which I have here forced myself to relate. Of the child mentioned in the advertisement, I never heard anything, from that time to this. I do not even know when it was born. I only know that its guilty mother left her home in the December of 1827. Whether it lived after the date of the advertisement, or whether it died, I never discovered, and never wished to discover. I have kept myself retired since the days of my humiliation, hiding my sorrow in my own heart, and neither asking questions nor answering them."

At this place, Mat once more suspended the perusal of the letter. He had now read on for an unusually long time with unflagging attention, and with the same stern sadness always in his face, except when the name of Arthur Carr occurred in the course of the narrative. Almost on every occasion when the finger by which he guided himself along the close lines of the letter, came to those words, it trembled a little, and the dangerous look grew ever brighter and brighter in his eyes. It was in them now, as he dropped the letter on his knee, and,

turning round, took from the wall behind him, against which it leaned, a certain leather-bag, already alluded to, as part of the personal property that he brought with him on installing himself in Kirk Street. He opened it, took out a feather fan, and an Indian tobacco pouch of scarlet cloth; and then began to search in the bottom of the bag, from which at length, he drew forth a letter. It was torn in several places, the ink of the writing in it was faded, and the paper was disfigured by stains of grease, tobacco, and dirt generally. The direction was in such a condition that the word "Brazils," at the end, was alone legible. Inside, it was not in a much better state. The date at the top, however, still remained tolerably easy to distinguish: it was "December 26th, 1827."

Mat looked first at this and then at the paragraph he had just been reading, in Johanna Grice's narrative. After that, he began to count on his fingers, clumsily enough—beginning with the year 1828 as Number One, and ending with the current year 1851, as Number Twenty-three. "Twenty-three," he repeated aloud to himself, "twenty-three year: I shall remember that." Then he looked down a little vacantly at the old torn letter again. Some

of the lines, here and there, had escaped stains and dirt sufficiently to be still easily legible; and it was over these that his eyes now wandered. The first words that caught his attention ran thus:—"I am now, therefore, in this bitter affliction, more than ever desirous that all past differences between us should be forgotten, and"—here the beginning of another line was hidden by a stain, beyond which, on the cleaner part of the letter, the writing proceeded:—"In this spirit, then, I counsel you, if you can get continued employment anywhere abroad, to accept it, instead of coming back"—(a rent in the paper made the next words too fragmentary to be easily legible). * * * "any good news be sure of hearing from me again. In the mean time, I say it once more, keep away, if you can. Your presence could do no good; and it is better for you, at your age, to be spared the sight of such sorrow as that we are now suffering." (After this, dirt and the fading of the ink made several sentences near the end of the page almost totally illegible—the last three or four lines at the bottom of the letter alone remaining clear enough to be read with any ease.) * * * "the poor, lost, unhappy creature! But I shall

find her, I know I shall find her; and then, let Johanna say or do what she may, I will forgive my own Mary, for I know she will deserve her pardon. As for *him*, I feel confident that he may be traced yet; and that I can shame him into making the atonement of marrying her. If he should refuse, then the black-hearted villain shall—”

At this point, Mat abruptly stopped in his reading; and, hastily folding up the letter, put it back in the bag again, along with the feather fan and the Indian pouch. “I can’t go on with that part of the story now, but the time *may* come, perhaps—” He pursued the thought which thus expressed itself in him no further, but sat still for a few minutes, with his head on his hand, and his heavy eyebrows contracted by an angry frown, staring sullenly at the flame of the candle. Johanna Grice’s letter still remained to be finished. He took it up, and looked back to the paragraph that he had last read.

“As for the child mentioned in the advertisement”—those were the words to which he was now referring. “*The child?*”—There was no mention of its sex. “I should like to have known if it was a boy or a girl,” thought Mat.

Though he was now close to the end of the letter,

he roused himself with difficulty to attend to the last few sentences which remained to be read. They began thus :—

“ Before I say anything, in conclusion, of the sale of our business, of my brother’s death, and of the life which I have been leading since that time, I should wish to refer, once for all, and very briefly, to the few things which my niece left behind her, when she abandoned her home. Circumstances may, one day, render this necessary. I desire then to state, that everything belonging to her is preserved in one of her boxes (now in my possession), just as she left it. When the letters signed ‘A. C.’ were discovered, as I have mentioned, on the occasion of repairs being made in the house, I threw them into the box with my own hand. They will all be found, more or less, to prove the justice of those first suspicions of mine, which my late brother so unhappily disregarded. In reference to money or valuables, I have only to mention that my niece took all her savings with her in her flight. I knew in what box she kept them, and I saw that box open and empty on her table, when I first discovered that she was gone. As for the only three articles of jewellery that she had, her brooch I myself saw her give to Ellen Gough—her

earrings she always wore—and I can only presume (never having found it anywhere) that she took with her, in her flight, her Hair Bracelet.”

“By God! there it is again!” cried Mat, dropping the letter in astonishment, the instant those two significant words, “Hair Bracelet,” caught his eye.

He had hardly uttered the exclamation, before he heard the door of the house flung open, then shut to again with a prodigious bang. Zack had just let himself in with his latch-key.

“I’m glad he’s come,” muttered Mat, snatching up the letter from the floor, and crumpling it into his pocket. “There’s another thing or two I want to find out, before I go any further—and Zack’s the chap to help me.”

CHAPTER III.

A FEW MORE DISCOVERIES.

WHEN Zack entered the room, and saw his queer friend, with legs crossed and hands in pockets, sitting gravely in the usual corner on the floor, between a brandy-bottle on one side, and a guttering, unsnuffed candle on the other, he roared with laughter, and stamped about in his usual boisterous way, till the flimsy little house seemed to be trembling under him to its very foundations. Mr. Marksman bore all this noise and ridicule, and all the jesting that followed it about the futility of drowning his passion for Madonna in the brandy-bottle, with the most unruffled and exemplary patience. The self-control he thus exhibited did not pass without its reward. Zack got tired of making jokes which had no effect, and of telling preposterous stories, which were received with the serenest inattention; and, passing at once

from the fanciful to the practical, astonished Mr. Marksman by suddenly communicating a very unexpected and very important piece of news.

"By-the-bye, Mat," said he, "we must sweep the place up, and look as respectable as we can before to-morrow night. My friend Blyth is coming to spend a quiet, social evening with us. I stayed behind till all the visitors had gone, on purpose to ask him."

"Do you mean he's coming to have a drop of grog and smoke a pipe along with us two?" asked Mr. Marksman, rather amazedly.

"I mean he's coming here, certainly; but as for grog and pipes, he never touches either. He's the best and dearest fellow in the world; but I'm ashamed to say he's spooney enough to like lemonade and tea. Smoking would make him sick directly; and, as for grog, I don't believe a drop ever passes his lips from one year's end to another. A weak head, Mat—a devilish weak head for drinking," concluded Zack, tapping his forehead with an air of bland Bacchanalian superiority.

Mr. Marksman seemed to have fallen into one of his thoughtful fits again. He made no answer; but, holding the brandy-bottle standing by his side up

before the candle, looked in to see how much liquor was left in it.

“Don’t begin to bother your head about the brandy : you needn’t get any more of it for Blyth,” continued Zack, noticing his friend’s action. “I say, old boy, do you know that the best thing you ever did in your life was saving Valentine’s picture in that way ? You have regularly won his heart by it. He was deuced suspicious of my making friends with you before ; but now—by Jove ! he doesn’t seem to think there’s a word in the English language that’s good enough for you. He said he should be only too glad to thank you again, when I asked him to come and judge of what you were really like in your own lodging. Tell him some of those splendid stories of yours. I’ve been terrifying him already with one or two of them at second-hand. Tell him that, about when you and the other chaps were exploring, and all but starved to death, and just going to cast lots which should be killed to feed the rest. Oh Lord ! how pale he’ll turn when he hears that ! and how hospitably we’ll treat him—won’t we ? You shall make his hair stand on end, Mat ; and I’ll make him some tea.”

“What does he do with them picters of his ?” asked Mr. Marksman. “Sell ’em ?”

"Of course!" answered the other, confidently; "and gets tremendous sums of money for them." Whenever Zack found an opportunity of magnifying a friend's importance, he always rose grandly superior to mere matter-of-fact restraints, and seized the golden moment without an instant of hesitation or a syllable of compromise.

"Gets lots of money, does he?" proceeded Mr. Marksman. "And keeps on hoarding of it up, I daresay, like all the rest of you over here?"

"*He* hoard money!" retorted Zack. "You never made a worse guess in your life. I don't believe he ever hoarded sixpence since he was a baby. If Mrs. Blyth didn't look after him, I don't suppose there would be five pounds in the house from one year's end to another."

There was a moment's silence. (It wasn't because he had money in it, then, thought Mat, that he shut down the lid of that chest of his so sharp, when the smilin' little chap come up to speak to him. I wonder whether—)

"He's the most generous fellow in the world," continued Zack, lighting a cigar; "and the best pay: ask any of his tradespeople."

This remark suspended the conjecture that was

just forming in Mr. Marksman's mind. He gave up pursuing it quite readily, and went on at once with his questions to Zack. Some part of the additional information that he desired to obtain from young Thorpe, he had got already. He knew now, that when Mr. Blyth, on the day of the picture-show, shut down the bureau so sharply on Mr. Gimble's approaching him, it was not, at any rate (as Mat had imagined in the studio), because there was money in it.

"Is he going to bring anybody else in here along with him, to-morrow night?" asked Mr. Marksman.

"Anybody else? Who the devil should he bring? Why, you old barbarian, you don't expect him to bring Madonna into our jolly bachelor den to preside over the grog and pipes—do you?"

"How old is the young woman?" inquired Mat, contemplatively snuffing the candle with his fingers, as he put the question.

"Still harping on my daughter!" shouted Zack, with a burst of laughter. "She's older than she looks, I can tell you that. You wouldn't guess her at more than eighteen or nineteen. But the fact is, she's actually twenty-three;—steady there! you'll be through the window if you don't sit quieter in your queer corner than that."

(Twenty-three! The very number he had stopped at when he reckoned off the difference on his fingers between 1828 and 1851, just before young Thorpe came in.)


"I suppose the next cool thing you will say, is that she's too old for you," Zack went on; "or, perhaps, you may prefer asking another question or two first. I'll tell you what, old Rough and Tough, the inquisitive part of your character is beginning to be——"

"Bother all this talking!" interrupted Mat, jumping up suddenly as he spoke, and taking a greasy pack of cards from the chimney-piece. "I don't ask no questions, and don't want no answers. Let's have a drop of grog and a turn-to at Beggar-my-Neighbour. Tuppence a time. Come on!"

They sat down at once to their cards and their brandy-and-water; playing uninterruptedly for an hour or more. Zack won; and—being additionally enlivened by the inspiring influences of grog—rose to a higher and higher pitch of exhilaration with every additional twopence which his good luck extracted from his adversary's pocket. His gaiety seemed at last to communicate itself even to the imperturbable Mat, who, in an interval of shuffling


the cards, was heard to deliver himself suddenly of one of those gruff chuckles, which have been already described as the nearest approach he was capable of making towards a civilised laugh.

He was so seldom in the habit of exhibiting any outward symptoms of hilarity, that Zack, who was dealing for the new game, stopped in astonishment, and inquired with great curiosity what it was that his friend was "grunting about." At first, Mat declined altogether to say ;—then, on being pressed, admitted that he was laughing over the recollection of something young Thorpe had told him after they left Valentine's studio ; and, finally, under stress of much farther questioning, at last confessed that his mind was just then running on the "old woman" Zack had spoken of, as having "suddenly fallen foul of him in Mr. Blyth's passage, because he wanted to give the young woman a present : " which circumstance, Mr. Marksman added, "so tickled his fancy somehow, that he would have given a crown piece out of his pocket only to have seen and heard the whole squabble all through from beginning to end." Zack, whose fancy was now exactly in the right condition to be "tickled" by anything that "tickled" his friend, seized in high glee the humorous side of the




topic suggested by Mat; and immediately began describing poor Mrs. Peckover's personal peculiarities in a strain of the most ridiculous exaggeration. Mr. Marksman listened, as he went on, with such admiring attention, and seemed to be so astonishingly amused by everything he said, that, in the excitement of success, he ran into the next room, snatched the two pillows off the bed, fastened one in front and the other behind him, tied the patchwork counterpane over all for a petticoat, and waddled back into his friend's presence, in the character of fat Mrs. Peckover, as she appeared on the memorable evening when she stopped him mysteriously in the passage of Mr. Blyth's house.

Zack was really a good mimic; and he now hit off all the peculiarities of Mrs. Peckover's voice, manner, and gait to the life—Mat chuckling all the while, rolling his huge head from side to side, and striking his heavy fist applaudingly on the table. Encouraged by the extraordinary effect his performances produced, Zack went through the whole of his scene with Mrs. Peckover in the passage, from beginning to end; following that excellent woman through all the various mazes of "rhodomontade" in which she then bewildered herself, and imitating her terror



when he threatened to run upstairs and ask Mr. Blyth if Madonna really had a hair bracelet, with such amazing accuracy and humour, as made Mr. Marksman vehemently declare that what he had just beheld for nothing would cure him of ever paying money again to see any regular play-acting as long as he lived.


By the time young Thorpe had reached the climax of his improvised dramatic entertainment, he had so thoroughly exhausted himself that he was glad to throw aside the pillows and the counterpane, and perfectly ready to spend the rest of the evening quietly in his chair. Accordingly he mixed himself a second glass of grog, lit another cigar, and devoted all the attention he had to spare from these two luxuries, to a perusal of that famous sporting newspaper, known under the modest and suggestive title of *Bell's Life in London*. His friend did not interrupt him by a word, except at the moment when he sat down to the newspaper; and then, Mat said simply and carelessly enough, that he thought he should detect the original Mrs. Peckover directly, by Zack's imitation, if ever he met with her in the streets. To which young Thorpe merely replied that he was not very likely to do anything of the sort,



because Mrs. Peckover lived at Rubbleford, where her husband had some situation, and where she herself kept a little dairy and muffin shop. "She don't come to town above once a year," concluded Zack, as he lit his cigar; "and then the Old Beauty stops in-doors all the time, at Blyth's!"

Mr. Marksman listened to this answer attentively, but offered no further remark. He went into the back room, where the water was, and busied himself in washing up all the spare crockery of the bachelor household in honour of Mr. Blyth's expected visit.

In process of time, Zack—on whom literature of any kind, high or low, always acted more or less as a narcotic—grew drowsy over his newspaper, let his grog get cold, dropped his cigar out of his mouth, and finally fell fast asleep in his chair. When he woke up, shivering, his watch had stopped, the candle was burning down in the socket, the fire was out, and Mr. Marksman was not to be seen, either in the front or the back room. Young Thorpe knew his friend's strange fancy for "going out over night" (as Mat phrased it) "to catch the morning the first thing in the fields," too well to be at all astonished at now finding himself alone. He moved away sleepily to bed, yawning out these words to himself:—"I shall



see the old boy back again as usual tomorrow morning, as soon as I wake."

When the morning came, this anticipation proved to be fallacious. The first objects that greeted Zack's eyes when he lazily awoke about eleven o'clock, were an arm and a letter, introduced cautiously through his partially opened bedroom door. Though by no means contemptible in regard to muscular development, this was not the hairy and herculean arm of Mat. It was only the arm of the servant of all work, who held the barbarous Mr. Marksman in such salutary awe that she had never been known to venture her whole body into the forbidden region of his apartments since he had first inhabited them. Zack jumped out of bed, and took the letter. It proved to be from Valentine, and summoned him to repair immediately to the painter's house to see Mrs. Thorpe, who earnestly desired to speak with him. His colour changed as he read the few lines Mr. Blyth had written, and thought of the prospect of meeting his mother face to face, for the first time since he had left his home. He hurried on his clothes, however, without a moment's delay, and went out directly—now walking at the top of his speed, now running, in his anxiety not to appear dilatory or careless in

paying obedience to the summons that had just reached him.

On arriving at the painter's house, he was shown into one of the parlours on the ground floor; and there sat Mrs. Thorpe, with Mr. Blyth to keep her company. The meeting between mother and son was characteristic on both sides. Without giving Valentine time enough to get from his chair to the door, without waiting an instant to ascertain what sentiments towards him were expressed in Mrs. Thorpe's face, without paying the smallest attention to the damage he did to her cap and bonnet, Zack saluted his mother with the old shower of hearty kisses and the old boisterously affectionate hug of his nursery and schoolboy days. And she, poor woman, on her side, feebly faltered over her first words of reproof—then, lost her voice altogether, pressed into his hand a little paper packet of money that she had brought for him, and wept on his breast without speaking another word. Thus it had been with them, long ago, when she was yet a young woman, and he but a boy—thus, even as it was now in the latter and the sadder time!

Mrs. Thorpe was long in regaining the self-possession which she had lost on first seeing her son. The


circumstances connected with their present meeting agitated and overpowered her almost as much as the meeting itself. Her own wish had been to go alone to Zack's lodging; but Mr. Blyth (whom she had consulted in her emergency) would not hear of her doing this, until he had himself seen what sort of place it was, and what sort of people inhabited it; and he pressed on her his offer of his own abode, as the scene of the interview, with such earnestness that she was quite unable to refuse him. With her previous habits of implicit conjugal obedience, however, it was in fear and trembling that she now entered Valentine's house—from which, in deference to her husband's merciless prejudices she had been estranged for so many years past—without having first obtained Mr. Thorpe's express permission. The agitation consequent on engaging in an act of such doubtful propriety had been enough to unnerve her when she reached the painter's abode; but it was increased tenfold, when she went up stairs (while Mr. Blyth was despatching his note to Zack), and renewed her long suspended acquaintance with Mrs. Blyth, and took Madonna by the hand for the first time since the deaf and dumb girl had been received into Valentine's house. The emotions thus aroused,

had exhausted all the little resisting strength of her feeble powers of self-control: and so it happened that they succumbed almost without a struggle, under the heavy additional trial of a first meeting with her son since he had been a fugitive from his home.

Zack expressed his contrition over and over again, and many times reiterated his promise to follow the plan Mr. Blyth had proposed to him when they met at the turnpike, before his mother became calm enough to speak three words together without bursting into tears. When she at last recovered herself sufficiently to be able to address him with some composure, she did not speak, as he had expected, of his past delinquencies, or of his future prospects, but of the lodging that he then inhabited, and of the stranger whom he had suffered to become his friend. Although Mat's gallant rescue of "Columbus" had warmly predisposed Valentine in his favour, the painter was too conscientious to soften facts, on that account, when he told Zack's mother where her son was now living, and what sort of companion he had chosen to lodge with. Mrs. Thorpe was timid, and distrustful as all timid people are; and she now entreated him with nervous eagerness to begin his promised reform by leaving

Kirk Street, and at once dropping his dangerous intimacy with a perfect stranger, who must certainly turn out sooner or later, to be a man of the vilest principles, being already by his own confession a vagabond of the idlest degree.

Zack defended his friend to his mother, exactly as he had already defended him to Valentine. Mr. Marksman had disinterestedly supplied him with money when he wanted it, and had hospitably given him a bed when he did not know where he was to sleep that night—therefore, although a little eccentric in his habits no doubt, Mr. Marksman was the most generous, trustworthy, and respectable of men. Mrs. Thorpe hinted not a word against the excellence of her son's arguments, but preserved her own opinion nevertheless, in defiance of all he could say to shake it, until he bethought himself of promising her that in this matter, as in all others, he would be finally guided by the opinion of Mr. Blyth. The assurance so given, accompanied as it was by the announcement that Valentine was about to form his own judgment of Mr. Marksman by visiting the house in Kirk Street that very night, seemed to quiet and satisfy Mrs. Thorpe. Her last hopes for her son's future, now that she was forced to admit the sad necessity




of conniving at his continued absence from home, rested one and all on Mr. Blyth alone.

This first difficulty smoothed over, Zack asked with no little apprehension and anxiety, whether his father's anger showed any symptoms of subsiding as yet. The question was an unfortunate one. Mrs. Thorpe's eyes began to fill with tears again, the moment she heard it. The news she had now to tell her son, in answering his inquiries, was of a very melancholy and a very hopeless kind.

The attack of palpitations in the heart which had seized Mr. Thorpe on the day of his son's flight from Baregrove Square, had been immediately and successfully relieved by the medical remedies employed ; but it had been followed, within the last day or two, by a terrible depression of spirits, under which the patient seemed to have given way entirely, and for which the doctor was unable to suggest any speedy process of cure. Few in number at all times, Mr. Thorpe's words had now become fewer than ever. His usual energy appeared to be gone altogether. He still went through all the daily business of the various Societies to which he belonged ; but it was mechanically, and without any apparent interest in the persons or events with which he was brought in

contact. He had only mentioned his son once in the last two days ; and then it was not to talk of reclaiming him, not to ask where he had gone, but only to desire briefly and despairingly that his name might not be mentioned again.

The doctor, in endeavouring to account for this sudden and serious moral alteration in Mr. Thorpe, could only say that his whole nervous system had been in a state of sad prostration and weakness for years and years past, and that even a slighter shock than the shock which it had so lately received would have been powerful enough to have broken it down altogether, as it was but too surely broken down now. The only possible remedies to recover him from the condition to which he was reduced, were change of air and scene, entire tranquillity, and absolute cessation from all employment of the brain—even to such slight occupation for it as the writing of an ordinary letter. When this advice was communicated to Mr. Thorpe, he positively refused to follow it. He declined giving up—only for the present, only for two or three months—any one of the honorary situations that he held, to any of the numerous friends who were willing to relieve him of his duties. He said, in the desponding tone which



now never varied, that the performance of those duties was the last and best interest which he had left in life ; and that he would hold to his various occupations, therefore, so long as he held to existence at all. It was useless to think of arguing him out of this resolution : every one who attempted it, from his wife downwards, attempted it in vain.

So far as Zack's interests or apprehensions were now concerned, there was, for the present at least, no fear of any new collision occurring between his father and himself. When Mrs. Thorpe had told her husband (after receiving Valentine's answer to her letter) that their runaway son was "in safe hands," Mr. Thorpe never asked, as she had feared he would, "What hands?" And, again, when she hinted that it might be perhaps advisable to assist the lad to some small extent, as long as he kept in the right way, and suffered himself to be guided by the "safe hands" already mentioned, still Mr. Thorpe made no objections and no inquiries, but bowed his head, and told her to do as she pleased : at the same time whispering a few words to himself, which were not uttered loud enough for her to hear. She could only, therefore, repeat the sad truth that, since his energies had given way, all his former plans and all

his customary opinions, in reference to his son, seemed to have undergone some disastrous and sudden alteration. It was only in consequence of this alteration, which appeared to render him as unfit to direct her how to act as to act himself, that she had ventured to undertake the responsibility of arranging the present interview with Zack, and of bringing him the small pecuniary assistance which Mr. Blyth had considered to be necessary in the present melancholy emergency.

The enumeration of all these particulars—interrupted, as it constantly was, by unavailing lamentations on one side and by useless self-reproaches on the other—occupied much more time than either mother or son had imagined. It was not till the clock in Mr. Blyth's hall struck, that Mrs. Thorpe discovered how much longer her absence from home had lasted than she had intended it should on leaving Baregrove Square. She rose directly, in great trepidation—took a hurried leave of Valentine, who was loitering about his front garden—sent the kindest messages she could think of to the ladies above stairs—and departed at once for home. Zack escorted her to the entrance of the square; and, on taking leave, showed the sincerity of his contrition

in a very unexpected and desperate manner, by actually offering to return home then and there with his mother, if she wished it! Mrs. Thorpe's heart yearned to take him at his word, but she remembered the doctor's orders and the critical condition of her husband's health; and forced herself to confess to Zack that the favourable time for his return had not yet arrived. After this—with mutual promises to communicate again soon through Valentine—they parted very sadly, just at the entrance of Baregrove Square: Mrs. Thorpe hurrying nervously to her own door, Zack returning gloomily to Mr. Blyth's house.

Meanwhile, how had Mr. Marksman been occupying himself, since he had left his young friend alone in the lodging in Kirk Street?

He had really gone out, as Zack had supposed, for one of those long night-walks of his, which usually took him well into the country before the first grey of daylight had spread far over the sky. On ordinary occasions, he only indulged in these oddly-timed pedestrian excursions because the restless habits engendered by his vagabond life made him incapable of conforming to civilised hours, by spending the

earliest part of the morning, like other people, inactively in bed. On this particular occasion, however, he had gone out with something like a special purpose; for he had left Kirk Street, not so much for the sake of taking a walk, as for the sake of thinking clearly and at his ease. Mat's brain was never so fertile in expedients as when he was moving his limbs freely in the open air.

Hardly a chance word had dropped from Zack that night which had not either confirmed him in his resolution to possess himself of Valentine's Hair Bracelet, or helped to suggest to him the manner in which his determination to obtain it might be carried out. The first great necessity imposed on him by his present design, was to devise the means of secretly opening the painter's bureau; the second was to hit on some safe method—should no chance opportunity occur—of approaching it unobserved. Mat had remarked that Mr. Blyth wore the key of the bureau attached to his watch-chain; and Mat had just heard from young Thorpe that Mr. Blyth was about to pay them a visit in Kirk Street. On the evening of that visit, therefore, the first of the two objects—the discovery of a means of secretly

opening the bureau—must, in some way, be attained. How?

This was the problem which Mr. Marksman set off to solve, to his own perfect satisfaction, in the silence and loneliness of a long night's walk.

In what precise number of preliminary mental entanglements he involved himself, before arriving at the desired solution, it would not be very easy to say. As usual, his thoughts wandered, every now and then, from his subject in the most irregular manner; actually straying away, on one occasion, as far as the New World itself, and unintelligibly occupying themselves with stories he had heard, and conversations he had held, in various portions of that widely-extended sphere, with vagabond chance-comrades from all parts of civilised Europe. How his mind ever got back from these past times and foreign places, to present difficulties and future considerations connected with the guest who was expected in Kirk Street, Mat himself would have been puzzled to tell. But it did eventually get back, nevertheless; and, what was still more to the purpose, it definitely and thoroughly worked out the intricate problem that had been set it to solve.

Not a whispered word of the plan he had now hit on dropped from Mr. Marksman's lips, as, turning it this way and that in his thoughts, he walked briskly back to town in the first fresh tranquillity of the winter morning. Discreet as he was, however, either some slight practical hints of his present project must have oozed out through his actions when he got back to London; or his notion of the sort of hospitable preparation which ought to be made for the reception of Mr. Blyth, was more barbarously and extravagantly eccentric than all the rest of his notions put together.

Instead of going home at once, when he arrived at Kirk Street, he stopped at certain shops in the neighbourhood to make some purchases which evidently had reference to the guest of the evening; for the first things he bought were two or three lemons and a pound of loaf sugar. So far his proceedings were no doubt intelligible enough; but they gradually became more and more incomprehensible when he began to walk up and down two or three streets, looking about him attentively, stopping at every locksmith's and ironmonger's shop that he passed, waiting to observe all the people who might

happen to be inside them, and then deliberately walking on again. In this way he approached, in course of time, a very filthy little row of houses, with some very ill-looking male and female inhabitants visible in detached positions, staring out of windows or lingering about public-house doors. Occupying the lower story of one of these houses was a small grimy shop, which, judging by the visible stock-in-trade, dealt on a much larger scale in iron and steel ware that was old and rusty, than in iron and steel ware that was new and bright. Before the counter no customers appeared; behind it there stood alone a squalid, bushy-browed, hump-backed man, as dirty as the dirtiest bit of iron about him, sorting old nails. Mat, who had unintelligibly passed the doors of respectable ironmongers, now, as unintelligibly, entered this doubtful and dirty shop; and addressed himself to the unattractive stranger behind the counter. The conference in which the two immediately engaged was conducted in low tones, and evidently ended to the satisfaction of both; for the squalid shopman began to whistle a tune as he resumed his sorting of the nails, and Mr. Marksman muttered to himself, "That's all right," as he came out on the pavement again.

His next proceeding — always supposing that it had reference to the reception of Mr. Blyth—was still more mysterious. He went into one of those grocer's shops which are dignified by the title of "Italian Warehouses," and bought a small lump of the very best refined wax! After making this extraordinary purchase, which he put into the pocket of his trousers, he next entered the public-house opposite his lodgings; and, in defiance of what Zack had told him about Valentine's temperate habits, bought and brought away with him, not only a fresh bottle of Brandy, but a bottle of old Jamaica Rum besides.

Young Thorpe had not returned from Mr. Blyth's, when Mat entered the lodgings with these purchases. He put the bottles, the sugar, and the lemons in the cupboard—cast a satisfied look at the three clean tumblers and spoons already standing on the shelf—relaxed so far from his usual composure of aspect as to smile—lit the fire, and heaped plenty of coal on, to keep it alight—then sat down on his bearskins—wriggled himself comfortably into the corner, and threw his handkerchief over his face; chuckling gruffly for the first time since the past night, as he put his hands in his pockets, and so


accidentally touched the lump of wax that lay in one of them.

"Now I'm all ready for Zack's friend," growled Mr. Marksman behind the handkerchief, as he quietly settled himself to go to sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SQUAW'S MIXTURE.

LIKE the vast majority of those persons who are favoured by Nature with, what is commonly termed, "a high flow of animal spirits," Zack was liable, at certain rare times and seasons, to fall from the utmost heights of exhilaration to the profoundest depths of despair, without stopping for a moment, by the way, at any intermediate stages of moderate cheerfulness, pensive depression, or tearful gloom. After he had parted from his mother, he presented himself again at Mr. Blyth's house, in such a lamentably despairing condition of mind, and talked of his delinquencies and their effect on his father's spirits, with such vehement bitterness of self-reproach, as quite amazed Valentine, and even alarmed him a little on the lad's account. The good-natured painter was no friend to contrite



desperation of any kind, and no believer in repentance, which could not look hopefully forward to the future, as well as sorrowfully back at the past. So he laid down his brush, just as he was about to begin varnishing the "Golden Age;" and set himself to console Zack, by reminding him of all the credit and honour he might yet win, if he was regular in attending to his new studies—if he never flinched from work at the British Museum, and the private Drawing School to which he was immediately to be introduced—and if he ended as he well might end, in excusing to his father his determination to be an artist, by showing Mr. Thorpe a prize medal, honourably won by the industry of his son's hand in the Schools of the Royal Academy.

A necessary characteristic of people whose spirits are always running into extremes, is that they are generally able to pass from one change of mood to another with unusual facility. By the time Zack had exhausted Mr. Blyth's copious stores of consolation, had partaken of an excellent and plentiful hot lunch, and had passed an hour up stairs with the ladies, he had recovered his accustomed gaiety in the most complete and magical manner. He

predicted his own reformation now, just as confidently as he had predicted his own ruin about two hours before; and went away to Kirk Street, to see that his friend Mat was at home to receive Valentine that evening, stepping along as nimbly and swinging his stick as cheerfully, as if he had already vindicated himself to his father by winning every prize medal that the Royal Academy could bestow on him.

Seven o'clock had been fixed as the hour at which Mr. Blyth was to present himself at the hospitable back and front drawing-room apartments of Messrs. M. Marksman and Z. Thorpe, Junior. He arrived punctual to the appointed time, dressed jauntily for the occasion in a short blue frock coat, famous among all his acquaintances for its smartness of cut and its fabulous old age. From what Zack had told him of Mat's lighter peculiarities of character, he anticipated rather a quaint and divertingly uncivilised reception from the elder of his two hosts; and when he got to Kirk Street, he certainly found that his expectations were, upon the whole handsomely realised.

On mounting the dark and narrow wooden staircase of the tobacconist's shop, his nose was greeted

by a composite smell of fried liver and bacon, brandy and water, and cigar smoke, pouring hospitably down to meet him through every practicable crevice of the drawing-room door. When he got into the room, the first object that struck his eyes at one end of it, was Zack, with his hat on, vigorously engaged in freshening up the dusty carpet with a damp mop; and Mr. Marksman, at the other, presiding over the frying-pan, with his coat off, his shirt-sleeves rolled up to his shoulders, a glass of steaming hot grog on the chimney-piece above him, and a long pewter toasting-fork in his hand. "Hullo, Mat! here's the honoured guest of the evening arrived before I've swabbed down the decks," cried Zack, jogging his friend in the ribs with the long handle of the mop. "How are you, to-night?" said Mr. Marksman, with familiar ease, not moving from the frying-pan, but getting his right hand free to offer to Mr. Blyth by taking the pewter toasting-fork between his teeth. "Sit down anywhere you like; and just holler through the crack in the floor, under the bearskins there, if you want anything out of the Bocker-shop, below." — ("He means Tobacco when he says Bocker," interposed Zack, parenthetically.) "Can you grub

a baked tater or two?" continued Mat, tapping a small Dutch oven before the fire with his toasting-fork. "We've got you a lot of fizzin' hot liver and bacon to ease down the taters with what you call a relish. Nice and streaky, aint it?" Here Mr. Marksman stuck his fork into a slice of bacon, and politely passed it over his shoulder for Mr. Blyth to inspect, as he stood bewildered in the middle of the room.

"Oh, delicious, delicious!" cried Valentine, smelling daintily at the outstretched bacon as if it had been a nosegay. "Really, my dear sir——." He said no more; for at that moment he tripped himself up upon one of some ten or a dozen bottle-corks which lay about on the carpet where he was standing. There is very little doubt, if Zack had not been by to catch him, that Mr. Blyth would just then have concluded his polite answer to Mr. Marksman by suddenly measuring his full length on the floor.

"Why don't you put him into a chair?" growled Mat, looking round reproachfully from the frying-pan, as Valentine recovered his erect position again with young Thorpe's assistance.

"I was just going to swab up that part of the

carpet when you came in," said Zack, apologetically, as he led Mr. Blyth to a chair.

"Oh don't mention it," answered Valentine, laughing. "It was all my awkwardness, my——" He stopped abruptly again. Zack had placed him with his back to the fire, against a table covered with a large and dirty cloth which flowed to the floor, and under which, while he was speaking, he had been gently endeavouring to insinuate his legs. Amazement bereft him of the power of speech when, on succeeding in this effort, he found that his feet came in contact with a perfect hillock of empty bottles, oyster-shells, and broken crockery, heaped under the table. "Good gracious me! I hope I'm doing no mischief!" exclaimed Valentine, as a miniature avalanche of oyster-shells clattered down on his intruding foot, and a plump bottle with a broken neck rolled lazily out from under the table-cloth, and courted observation on the open floor.

"Kick about, old chap, kick about as much as you please," cried Zack, seating himself opposite Mr. Blyth, and bringing down a second avalanche of oyster-shells to encourage him. "The fact is, we are rather put to it for space here, so we keep the cloth always laid for dinner, and make a

temporary lumber-room of the place under the table. Rather a new idea that, I think—not tidy perhaps, but new and ingenious, which is much better.”

“Oh, wonderfully ingenious!” said Valentine, who was now beginning to be amused as well as amazed by his reception in Kirk Street. “Rather untidy, perhaps, as you say, Zack; but new and not disagreeable I suppose when you’re used to it. What I like about all this,” continued Mr. Blyth, rubbing his hands cheerfully, and kicking into view another empty bottle, as he settled himself in his chair—“What I like about this is, that it’s so thoroughly free and easy. Do you know that I really feel at home already, though I never was here before in my life?—Curious, Zack, isn’t it?”

“Taters!” roared Mr. Marksman suddenly from the fire-place. Valentine started, first at the unexpected shout just behind him, next at the sight of a big truculently-knobbed potato which came flying over his head, and was dexterously caught, and instantly deposited on the dirty table-cloth by Zack. “Two, three, four, five, six,” continued Mat, keeping the frying-pan going with one hand, and tossing the baked potatoes with the other over Mr. Blyth’s head, in quick succession for young Thorpe to

catch. "What do you think of our way of dishing up potatoes in Kirk Street?" asked Zack in great triumph. "Oh, capital," stammered Valentine, ducking his head as each edible missile flew over it. "Capital! So free and easy—so delightfully free and easy." "Ready there with your plates. The liver's a-coming," cried Mat in a voice of martial command, suddenly showing his great red-hot perspiring face at the table, as he wheeled round from the fire, with the hissing frying-pan in one hand, and the long toasting-fork in the other. "My dear sir, I'm shocked to see you taking all this trouble," exclaimed Mr. Blyth. "Do pray let me help you!" "No, I'm d—d if I do," returned Mr. Marksman with the most polite suavity and the most perfect good humour. "Let him have all the trouble, Blyth," said Zack; "let him help you, and don't pity him. He'll make up for all his hard work, I can tell you, when he sets in seriously to his liver and bacon. Just you watch him when he begins—he bolts his dinner like the lion in the Zoological Gardens."

Mr. Marksman appeared to receive this speech of Zack's as a very welcome and well-merited compliment, for he chuckled at young Thorpe and

winked grimly at Valentine, as he sat down bare-armed to his own mess of liver and bacon. It was certainly a rare and even startling sight to see Mat eat. Lump by lump, without one intervening morsel of bread, he tossed the meat into his mouth rather than put it there—turned it apparently once round between his teeth—and then voraciously and instantly swallowed it whole. By the time a quarter of Mr. Blyth's plateful of liver and bacon, and half of Zack's, had disappeared, Mr. Marksman had finished his frugal meal; had wiped his mouth on the back of his hand, and the back of his hand on the leg of his trousers; had mixed two glasses of strong hot rum-and-water for himself and Zack; and had set to work on the composition of a third tumbler, into which sugar, brandy, lemon-juice, rum, and hot water all seemed to drop together in such incessant and confusing little dribblets, that it was quite impossible to tell which ingredient was uppermost in the whole mixture. When the tumbler was full, he set it down on the table, with an indicative bang, close to Valentine's plate.

"Just try a toothful of that, to begin with," said Mat. "If you like it, say Yes; if you don't, say No; and I'll make it better next time."

"You are very kind, very kind indeed," answered Mr. Blyth, eyeing the tumbler by his side with some little confusion and hesitation; "but really, though I should be shocked to appear ungrateful, I'm afraid I must own—Zack, you ought to have told your friend——"

"So I did," said Zack, sipping his rum-and-water with infinite relish.

"The fact is, my dear sir," continued Valentine, "I have the most wretched head in the world for strong liquor of any kind——"

"This ain't strong liquor," interposed Mr. Marksman, emphatically tapping the rim of his guest's tumbler with his fore-finger.

"Perhaps," pursued Mr. Blyth, with a polite smile, "I ought to have said grog."

"This ain't grog," retorted Mat, with two disputatious taps on the rim of the glass.

"Dear me!" asked Valentine, amazedly, "what is it then?"

"Squaw's Mixture," answered Mr. Marksman, with three distinct taps of asseveration.

Mr. Blyth and Zack laughed, under the impression that their queer companion was joking with them. Mat looked steadily and sternly from one to the

other; then repeated with the gruffest gravity—
“Squaw’s Mixture.”

“What a very curious name! How is it made?”
asked Valentine.

“Enough Brandy to spile the Water. Enough Rum to spile the Brandy and Water. Enough Lemon to spile the Rum *and* Brandy *and* Water. Enough Sugar to spile Everything. That’s ‘Squaw’s Mixture,’” responded Mr. Marksman with perfect calmness and deliberation.

Zack began to laugh uproariously. Mat became more inflexibly grave than ever. Mr. Blyth felt that he was growing interested on the subject of the Squaw’s Mixture. He stirred it diffidently with his spoon, and asked with great curiosity how Mr. Marksman first learnt to make it.

“When I was out, over there, in the Nor’-West,” began Mat, nodding towards the particular point of the compass that he mentioned.

“When he says Nor’-West, and wags his addled old head like that at the chimney-pots over the way, he means North America,” Zack explained.

“When I was out Nor’-West,” repeated Mat, heedless of the interruption, “working along with the exploring gang, our stock of liquor fell short,

and we had to make the best of it in the cold with a spirt of spirits and a pinch of sugar, drowned in more hot water than had ever got down the throat of e'er a man of the lot of us before. We christened the brew 'Squaw's Mixture,' because it was such weak stuff that even a woman couldn't have got drunk on it if she'd tried. Squaw means woman in those parts, you know; and Mixture means — what you've got afore you now. I knowed you couldn't stand regular grog, and that's why I cooked it up for you. Don't keep on stirring of it with a spoon like that, or you'll stir it away altogether. Try it."

"Let *me* try it—let's see how weak it is," cried Zack, reaching over to Valentine.

"Don't you go a-shoving of your oar into another man's rollocks," said Mr. Marksman, dexterously knocking Zack's spoon out of his hand just as it touched Mr. Blyth's tumbler. "You stick to *your* grog; I'll stick to *my* grog; and *he'll* stick to Squaw's Mixture." With these words, Mat leant his bare elbows on the table, and watched Valentine's first experimental sip with great curiosity.

The result was not successful. When Mr. Blyth put down the tumbler, all the watery part of the Squaw's Mixture seemed to have got up into his

eyes, and all the spirituous part to have stopped short at his lungs. He shook his head, coughed, and faintly exclaimed—"Too strong."

"Too hot, you mean?" said Mat.

"No, indeed," pleaded poor Mr. Blyth, "I really meant too strong."

"Try again," suggested Zack, who was far advanced towards the bottom of his own tumbler already. "Try again; your liquor all went the wrong way last time."

"More sugar," said Mr. Marksman, neatly tossing two lumps into the glass from where he sat. "More lemon" (squeezing one or two drops of juice, and three or four pips, into the Mixture). "More water" (pouring in about a tea-spoonful, with a clumsy flourish of the kettle). "Try again."

"Thank you, thank you a thousand times. Really, do you know, it tastes much nicer now," said Mr. Blyth, beginning cautiously with a spoonful of the Squaw's Mixture at a time.

Mr. Marksman's spirits seemed to rise immensely at this announcement. He lit his pipe—then took up his glass of grog; nodded to Valentine and young Thorpe, just as he had nodded to the north-west point of the compass a minute or two before;

muttered solemnly, "Here's all our good healths ;" and finished half his liquor at a draught.

"All our good healths," repeated Mr. Blyth, gallantly attacking the Squaw's Mixture this time, without any intermediate assistance from the spoon.

"All our good healths," chimed in Zack, draining his glass to the bottom. "Really, Mat, it's quite delightful to see how your dormant social qualities are waking up and asserting themselves now you're fairly plunged into the Vortex of Society. What do you say to giving a Ball here next? You're just the man to get on with the ladies, if you could only be prevailed on to wear your coat, and give up airing your tawny old arms in public."

"Don't, my dear Sir! I particularly beg you won't," cried Valentine, as Mr. Marksman, apparently awakened to a sense of polite propriety by Zack's last hint, began to unroll one of his tightly tucked-up shirt-sleeves. "Pray consult your own comfort, and keep your sleeves as they were—pray do! As an artist, I have been admiring your arms from the professional point of view, ever since we first sat down to table. I never remember—never, I assure you, in all my long experience of the living model—having met with such a splendid muscular

development as yours." With these words, Mr. Blyth waved his hand several times before Mat's arms; regarding them with his eyes partially closed and his head very much on one side, just as he was accustomed to look at his pictures. Mr. Marksman stared, smoked vehemently, folded the objects of Valentine's admiration over his breast, and, modestly scratching his elbows, looked at young Thorpe with an expression of utter bewilderment. "Yes; decidedly the most magnificent muscular development I ever remember studying," reiterated Mr. Blyth, drumming with his fingers on the table, and concentrating the whole of his critical acumen in one eye, by totally closing the other.

"Hang it, Blyth," remonstrated Zack, "don't keep on looking at the old boy's arms like that, as if they were a couple of bits of prize beef! You may talk about his muscular development as much as you please, but you can't have the smallest notion of what it's really equal to, till you try it. I say, Mat! jump up, and show him how strong you are. Just lift him on your toe, like you did me." (Here Zack pulled Mr. Marksman unceremoniously out of his chair.) "Come along, Blyth! Get opposite to him—give him hold of your hand—stand on the toe part of his

right foot—don't wriggle about—stiffen your hand and arm—and—there! what do you say to his muscular development now?" concluded Zack, with an air of supreme triumph, as Mat slowly lifted from the ground the foot on which Mr. Blyth was standing, and, steadying himself on his left leg, raised the astonished painter with his right, nearly two feet high in the air.


Any spectator observing the performance of this feat of strength, and looking only at Mr. Marksman, might well have thought it impossible that any human being could present a more comical aspect than he now exhibited, with his black skull-cap pushed a little on one side, and showing an inch or so of his bald head, with his grimly grinning face empurpled by the violent physical exertion of the moment, and with his thick, heavy figure ridiculously perched on one leg. Mr. Blyth, however, was beyond all comparison the more laughable object of the two, as he soared nervously into the air on Mat's foot, tottering infirmly in the strong grasp that supported him, till he seemed to be trembling all over, from the tips of his crisp black hair to the flying tails of his frock-coat. As for the expression of his round rosy face, with the bright eyes fixed in a startled stare, and

the plump cheeks crumpled up by an uneasy smile, it was so exquisitely absurd, as young Thorpe saw it over his fellow-lodger's black skull-cap, that he roared again with laughter. "Oh, Mat, Mat!" cried Zaek, falling back in his chair, "look up at him! Look at his face, for Heaven's sake, before you put him down!"

But Mr. Marksman was not to be moved by this appeal. All the attention his eyes could spare during those few moments, was devoted, not to Mr. Blyth's face, but to Mr. Blyth's watch-chain. There hung the bright little key of the painter's bureau, dangling jauntily to and fro over his waistcoat-pocket. As Mat's right foot hoisted him up slowly, the key swung temptingly backwards and forwards between them. "Come take me! come take me!" it seemed to say, as Mr. Marksman's eyes fixed greedily on it, every time it dangled towards him.

"Wonderful! wonderful!" cried Mr. Blyth, looking excessively relieved when he found himself safely set down on the floor again.

"That's nothing to some of the things he can do," said Zaek. "If you don't mind lying stomach downwards on the carpet, and you think the waistband of your trousers would stand it, he'll take you up in his teeth."



"Thank you, Zack, I'm perfectly satisfied without carrying the thing any further," rejoined Valentine, returning in a great hurry to the table.

"The grog's getting cold," grumbled Mat. "Do you find it slip down easy now?" he continued, handing the Squaw's Mixture quite politely to Mr. Blyth.

"Delicious," answered Valentine, drinking this time almost with the boldness of Zack himself. "Now it's cooler, one tastes the sugar. Whenever I've tried to drink regular grog, I have never been able to get people to give it me sweet enough. The delicious part of this is that there's plenty of sugar in it. And, besides, it has the merit (which real grog has not) of being harmless. It tastes strong to *me*, to be sure" (sipping from the glass as he spoke); "but then I'm not used to spirits. After what you say, however, of course it must be harmless—quite harmless, I have no doubt." Here he sipped again, pretty freely this time, by way of convincing himself of the perfect harmlessness of the Squaw's Mixture. While Mr. Blyth had been speaking, Mr. Marksman's hands had been gradually stealing down deeper and deeper into the pockets of his trousers, until his finger and thumb, and a certain plastic

substance hidden away in the left-hand pocket came gently into contact, just as Valentine left off speaking. "Let's have another toast," cried Mat, quite briskly, the instant the last word was out of his guest's mouth. "Come on, one of you, and give us another toast," he reiterated, with a roar of barbarous joviality, taking up his glass in his right hand, and keeping his left still in his pocket.

"Give you another toast, you noisy old savage!" repeated Zack, "I'll give you *five*, all at once! Mr. Blyth, Mrs. Blyth, Madonna, Columbus, and The Golden Age—three excellent people and two glorious pictures: let's add them together, in a friendly way, and drink long life and success to them all in a lump," shouted the young gentleman, making perilously rapid progress through his second glass of grog as he spoke.

"Do you know, I'm afraid I must change to some other place, if you have no objection," said Mr. Blyth, after he had duly honoured the composite toast just proposed. "The fire here, behind me, is getting rather too——"

"Change along with me," said Mat. "I don't mind heat, nor cold neither, for the matter of that."

Valentine accepted this offer with great gratitude.

"By the by, Zack," said he, placing himself comfortably in his host's chair, between the table and the wall. "I was going to ask a favour of our excellent friend here, when you suggested that wonderful and matchless trial of strength which we have just had. You have been of such inestimable assistance to me already, my dear sir," he continued, turning towards Mat, with all his natural cordiality of disposition now fully developed under the fostering influence of the Squaw's Mixture. "You have laid me under such an inexpressible obligation in saving my picture from destruction, that I feel some hesitation at asking you to do me another favour so soon ; but really——"

"I wish you could make up your mind to say what you want in plain words," interrupted Mat. "I'm one of your rough-handed, thick-headed sort, *I* am. I ain't gentleman enough to understand parlayer. It don't do me no good : it only worrits me into a perspiration." And Mr. Marksman, shaking down his shirt-sleeve, drew it several times across his forehead, as a proof of the truth of his last assertion.

"Quite right ! quite right !" cried Mr. Blyth, patting him on the shoulder in the most friendly

manner imaginable. "In plain words, then, when I mentioned, just now, how much I admired your arms in an artistic point of view, I was only paving the way for asking you to let me make a study of them, in black and white, for the arms in a large picture that I mean to paint later in the year. My classical figure composition, you know, Zack—you have seen the sketch—Hercules bringing to King Eurystheus the Erymanthian Boar—a glorious subject; and our friend's arms, and indeed his chest, too, if he would kindly consent to sit for it, would make the very studies I most want for Hercules."

"What the devil *is* he driving at?" asked Mat, addressing himself to young Thorpe, after staring at Valentine for a moment or two in a state of speechless amazement.

"He wants to draw your arms, of course you will be only too happy to let him, you can't understand anything about it now, but you will when you begin to sit, pass the cigars, thank Blyth for meaning to make a Hercules of you, and tell him you'll come to the painting-room whenever he likes," answered Zack, joining his sentences together in his most off-hand manner, all in a breath.

"What painting-room? Where is it?" asked Mat, still in a densely stupefied condition.

"My painting-room," replied Valentine. "Where you saw the pictures, and saved Columbus, yesterday."

Mat considered for a moment — then suddenly brightened up, and began to look quite intelligent again. "I'll come," he said, "as soon as you like — the sooner the better," clapping his fist emphatically on the table, and drinking to Valentine with his heartiest nod.

"That's a worthy, good-natured fellow!" cried Mr. Blyth, drinking to Mat in return, with grateful enthusiasm. "The sooner the better, as you say. Come to-morrow evening."

"All right. To-morrow evening," assented Mr. Marksman. His left hand, as he spoke, began to work, stealthily, round and round in his pocket, moulding into all sorts of strange shapes, that plastic substance which had lain hidden there ever since his shopping expedition in the morning.

"I should have asked you to come in the daytime," continued Valentine; "but, as you know, Zack, I have the Golden Age to varnish, and one or two little things to alter in the lower part of Columbus,

—and, then, by the end of the week, I must leave home to do those portraits in the country which I told you of, and which are wanted before I thought they would be. I might put off making the study from our friend's arms till I get back, certainly; but then, I am not sure, to a day, when that will be; and I always like to catch a good opportunity the moment I can get it, and—and, in short, if it's convenient, let us begin by all means to-morrow evening. You will come with our friend, of course, Zack? I dare say I shall have the order for you to study at the British Museum, by to-morrow. As for the Private Drawing Academy——”

“No offence; but I can't stand seeing you stirring up them grounds in the bottom of your glass any longer,” Mat broke in here; taking away Mr. Blyth's tumbler as he spoke, throwing the sediment of sugar, the lemon pips, and the little liquor left to cover them, into the grate behind; and then, hospitably devoting himself to the concoction of a second supply of that palatable and innocuous beverage, the Squaw's Mixture.

“Half a glass,” cried Mr. Blyth. “Weak—remember my wretched head for drinking, and pray make it weak!”

As he said this, the clock of the neighbouring parish church struck.

"Only nine," exclaimed Zack, referring ostentatiously to the watch which he had taken out of pawn the day before. "Pass the rum, Mat, as soon as you've done with it—put the kettle on to boil—and now, my lads, we'll begin spending the evening in earnest!"


* * * *

If any fourth gentleman had been present to assist in "spending the evening," as Zack chose to phrase it, at the small social *soirée* held by Mr. Marksman and Mr. Thorpe the Younger, at their apartments in Kirk Street; and if that gentleman had deserted the festive board as the clock struck nine—had walked about the streets to enjoy himself in the fresh air—and had then, as the clock struck ten, returned to the society of his convivial companions, he would most assuredly have been taken by surprise, unless his temperament were of the most phlegmatic kind, on beholding the singular change which the lapse of one hour had been sufficient to produce in the manners and conversation of Mr. Valentine Blyth.

It might have been that the worthy and simple-

hearted gentleman had been unduly stimulated by the reek of hot grog, which in harmonious association with a heavy mist of tobacco smoke, now filled the room ; or it might have been that the second brew of the Squaw's Mixture had exceeded half a glassful in quantity, had not been diluted to the requisite weakness, and had consequently got into his head : but, whatever the exciting cause might be, the alteration that had taken place since nine o'clock, in his voice, looks, and manners, was remarkable enough to be of the nature of a moral phenomenon. He now talked incessantly about nothing but the fine arts ; he differed with both his companions, and loftily insisted on his own superior sagacity, whenever either of them ventured to speak a word ; he was by turns as noisy as Zack, and as gruff as Mat ; his hair was crumpled down over his forehead, his eyes were dimmed, his shirt collar was turned rakishly over his cravat : in short, he was not the genuine Valentine Blyth at all,—he was only a tipsy counterfeit of him.

As for young Thorpe, any slight steadiness of brain which he might naturally possess, he had long since parted with, as a matter of course, for the rest of the evening. He was, just now, in a highly



variable condition of temper,—being, at one moment, more oppressively noisy and racketty than usual, and appearing, at another, to plunge suddenly into the lowest depths of the deepest imaginable reverie. Mr. Marksman alone remained unchanged. There he sat, reckless of the blazing fire behind him, still with that left hand of his dropping stealthily every now and then into his pocket; smoking, drinking, and staring at his two companions, just as gruffly self-possessed as ever.

“There’s ten,” muttered Mat, as the clock struck. “I said we should be getting jolly by ten. So we are.”

Zack nodded his head solemnly, and stared hard at one of the empty bottles on the floor, which had rolled out from the temporary store-room under the table. He was immersed in another of his profoundly thoughtful fits just then—his sixth within the last half hour.

“Hold your tongues, both of you!” cried Mr. Blyth. “I insist on clearing up that disputed point about whether painters are not just as hardy and strong as other men. I’m a painter myself, and I say they are. I’ll agree with you in everything else; for you’re the two best fellows in the world;

but if you say they're not, why then all I say is, be quiet and look at me ! We painters are the gods of the earth—you may laugh, but we are. You may talk to me, by the hour together about great generals and prime ministers—I mention the glorious names of Michael Angelo and Raphael ; and down goes your argument directly. When Michael Angelo's nose was broken do you think he minded it ? Look in his Life, and see if he did—that's all ! Ha ! ha ! My painting-room is forty feet long (now this is an important proof). While I was painting Columbus and the Golden Age, one was at one end—north ; and the other at the other—south. Very good. I walked backwards and forwards between those two pictures incessantly ; and never sat down all day long. This is a fact, and the proof is, that I worked on both of them at once. A touch on Columbus—a walk into the middle of the room to look at the effect—turn round—walk up to the Golden Age opposite—a touch on the Golden Age—another walk into the middle of the room to look at the effect—another turn round—and back again to Columbus. Fifteen miles a day of studio exercise, according to the calculation of a friend of mine ; and including the number of times I had to go up

and down my portable wooden steps to get at the top parts of Columbus. Isn't a man hardy and strong who can stand that? Strong? Ha! ha! Just feel my legs, Zack. Are my calves hard and muscular, or are they not?"

Here Mr. Blyth, rapping young Thorpe smartly on the head with his spoon, tried to skip out of his chair as nimbly as usual; but only succeeded in floundering awkwardly into an upright position, after he had knocked down his plate with all the greasy remains of the liver and bacon on it. Zack woke up from his muddled meditation, with a start; and, under pretence of obeying his friend's injunction, pinched Valentine's leg with such vigorous malice, that the painter fairly screamed again under the infliction. All this time, Mr. Marksman sat immovably serene in his place next to the fire. He just quietly kicked Mr. Blyth's broken plate, with the scraps of liver and bacon, and the knife and fork that had fallen with them, into the temporary store-room under the table—and then went on smoking as composedly as ever.

"*Your* legs, indeed!" cried Zack, pushing Valentine back into his chair again. "Hide them under the table directly, or I shall be seriously disgusted



with you. I say, Mat, if you want to know why Blyth always wears such infernally tight trousers, I can tell you—he's actually proud of his legs!"

"No!" shouted Valentine, striking his fist quite ferociously on the table. "It's my ideas of costume that I'm proud of, because they're in advance of the age. As an artist, I stick by the eternal principles of Taste, which are that the dress must follow the lines of the human Form. I told Trimboy, my tailor, from the first, I wouldn't have my legs put into a couple of loose cloth bags. I said, I don't care for fashions, and I won't deal with you unless you follow my Form. I drew him diagrams, I taught him the anatomy of the human leg, I made him reflect, and what is the consequence? Trimboy is one of the most extraordinary characters I know. He's the only man in England who can fit me properly with a pair of trousers—and even *he* can't make them except when he's drunk."

"Oh-h-h! What an incredibly interesting anecdote!" exclaimed Zack, with a groan of derision.

"It's true," cried Mr. Blyth. "Be quiet, and I'll prove it. Trimboy dines in the middle of the day. He's generally sober and stupid before dinner:

he's always drunk and intelligent after dinner. Wait! I'm coming to the point. When he brought home my last pair of trousers but four, they bagged at the knees, and there was a crease a foot long over one of the hips. 'Mr. Trimboy,' says I, 'what's the meaning of this?' 'Sir,' says he, 'I'm above any low-lived notions of deceiving you. That's the first pair of trousers I ever ventured to cut out for you before I'd had my dinner; and the long and short of it is, I've messed 'em. If you'll only look over the error in judgment this once, sir, I promise faithfully that it shall never occur again.' Of course, I looked over the error in judgment; and what was the consequence? it never did occur again. Now I should like to know what anybody has got to say to that?"

. As Valentine ceased, Mr. Marksman gently pushed towards him another glass of the Squaw's Mixture, quietly concocted while he had been talking. The effect on him of this hospitable action proved to be singularly soothing and beneficial. He had been getting gradually more and more disputatious with Zack for the last ten minutes; but the moment the steaming glass touched his hand, it seemed to change his mood

with the most magical celerity. As he looked down at it, and felt the fragrant rum steaming softly into his nostrils, his face expanded with the most genial and benevolent of smiles. While his left hand unsteadily conveyed the tumbler to his lips, his right reached across the table and fraternally extended itself to Mat. "My dear friend," said Mr. Blyth affectionately, turning away from Zack as he set his glass down again, and apparently forgetting on a sudden that there was such a person as young Thorpe in the room—"My dear friend, how kind you are! Pray how do you make the Squaw's Mixture?"

"He's told you already!" said Zack, throwing a piece of lemon-peel at Valentine's face.


"He's told me already," echoed Mr. Blyth, in the most mellifluous of voices, taking no more notice of the lemon-peel than he took of young Thorpe.

"I say, Mat, leave off smoking, and be hanged to you," said Zack. "Tell us something. Bowl away at once with one of your tremendous stories, or Blyth will be bragging again, before we can stop him, about his ricketty old legs and Trimboy the tailor. Talk, man! Tell us your crack story of how you lost your scalp."

"Of how you lost your scalp—eh?" repeated Valentine in his most melodious tones, drinking again, leaning back till his head rested against the wall, and still not taking the smallest notice of Zack.

Mat laid down his pipe, and for a moment looked very attentively at Mr. Blyth—then, with the most unprecedented readiness and docility, began his story at once, without requiring another word of persuasion. Young Thorpe prepared to listen to it in perfect comfort by turning himself sideways to the table (so that his back was towards Valentine), and luxuriously stretching his great legs out to their full length on the floor.

Mr. Marksman was in general the very reverse of tedious when he related any experiences of his own ; but on this particular occasion he seemed strangely bent on letting his narrative ooze out drowsily to the most interminable length. Instead of adhering to the abridged account of his terrible adventure, which he had given Zack when they first talked together on Blackfriars Bridge, he now dwelt on all the minutest particulars of the murderous chase that had so nearly cost him his life, enumerating them one after the other in the same heavy droning voice which never changed its tone in the slightest




degree as he went on. After about ten minutes' drowsy endurance of the narrative-infliction which he had himself provoked, young Thorpe was just beginning to feel a sensation of utter oblivion stealing over him, when a sound of lusty snoring close at his back startled him into instant wakefulness. He looked round. There was Mr. Blyth placidly and profoundly asleep, with his mouth wide open and his head resting against the wall.

"Stop!" whispered Mat, as Zack seized on a half-squeezed lemon and took aim at Valentine's mouth. "Don't wake him yet. Are you game for some oysters?"

"Game? I should think I was?" returned young Thorpe. "Give us a dish—Sally's in bed by this time—I'll go and fetch them from over the way. But, I say, d—n it, I must have one shy."

"Get the oysters first," said Mat, producing from the cupboard behind him a large yellow pie-dish. "Let's wake him up with a cold *native* flopped into his mouth. Come on! I'll see you down stairs, and leave the candle on the landing, and the door on the jar, so as you can get in quietly. Steady, young un! and mind the dish when you cross the road." With these words Mr. Marksman dismissed



Zack from the street-door to the oyster shop ; and then returned immediately to his guest upstairs.

Valentine was still fast asleep and snoring vehemently. Mat's hand descended again into his pocket, reappearing, however, quickly enough on this occasion, with the piece of wax which he had purchased that morning. Steadying his arms coolly on the table, he detached the little chain which held the key of Mr. Blyth's bureau, from the watchguard to which it was fastened, took off on his wax a perfect impression of the whole key from the pipe to the handle, attached it again to the sleeper's watchguard, pared away the rough ends of the piece of wax till it fitted into an old tin tobacco-box which he took from the chimney-piece, pocketed this box, and then quietly resumed his original place at the table.

"Now," said Mat, looking at the unconscious Mr. Blyth, after he had lit his pipe again ; "Now Painter Man ! wake up as soon as you like."

It was not long before Zack returned. A violent bang of the street-door announced his entry into the passage—a confused clattering and stumbling marked his progress upstairs—a shrill crash, a heavy thump, and a shout of laughter indicated his arrival

on the landing. Mat ran out directly, and found him prostrate on the floor, with the yellow pie-dish in halves at the bottom of the stairs, and dozens of oyster-shells scattered about him in every direction.

"Hurt?" inquired Mat, pulling him up by the collar, and dragging him into the room.

"Not a bit of it," answered Zack, laughing as heartily as if his fall had been an excellent joke. "I've woke Blyth, though (worse luck!) and spoilt our fun with the cold *native*, havn't I? Oh, Lord! how he stares!"

Valentine certainly did stare. He was standing up, leaning against the wall, and looking about him in a wofully dazed condition. Either his nap, or the alarming manner in which he had been awakened from it, had produced a decided change for the worse in him. As he slowly recovered what little sense he had left to make use of, all his talkativeness and cordiality seemed to desert him. He shook his head mournfully; refused to eat or drink anything; said with sullen solemnity, that his digestion was "a perfect wreck in consequence of his keeping drunken society;" and insisted on going home directly, in spite of everything that Zack could say to him. The landlord, who had

been brought from his shop below by the noise, and who thought it very desirable to take the first opportunity that offered of breaking up the party before any more grog was consumed, officiously ran down stairs, and called a cab—the result of this manœuvre proving in the sequel to be what the tobacconist desired. The moment the sound of wheels was heard at the door, Mr. Blyth clamoured peremptorily for his hat and coat ; and, after some little demur, was at last helped into the cab in the most friendly and attentive manner by Mr. Marksman himself.

“Just see the lights out upstairs, and the young un in bed, will ye?” said Mat to his landlord, as they stood together on the door-step. “I’m going to blow some of the smoke out of me by taking a turn in the fresh air.”

He walked away briskly, as he said the last words ; but when he got to the end of the street, instead of proceeding northwards towards the country, and the cool night-breeze that was blowing from it, he perversely turned southwards towards the most filthy little lanes and courts in the whole neighbourhood ; into which the merciful fresh air had tried hard to penetrate for many a long year past, and had been regularly refused admission, except under

the poisonous passports of the presiding district authority—KING DIRT.

Stepping along at a rapid pace, Mr. Marksman directed his course towards that particular row of small and vile houses which he had already visited early in the day, and stopped, as before, at the second-hand iron shop. It was shut up for the night; but a dim light, as of one farthing candle, glimmered through the circular holes in the tops of the shutters; and when Mat knocked at the door with his knuckles, it was opened immediately by the same squalid hump-backed shopman with whom he had conferred in the morning.

"Got it?" asked the hunch-back in a cracked querulous voice, the moment the door was ajar.

"All right," answered Mat in his gruffest bass tones, handing to the little man the tin tobacco-box.

"We said to-morrow evening, didn't we?" continued the squalid shopman.

"Not later than six," added Mat.

"Not later than six," repeated the other, shutting the door softly as Mr. Marksman walked away—northward this time—to seek the fresh air in good earnest.

CHAPTER V.

THE GARDEN DOOR.

"Hit or miss, I'll chance it to-night." These words were the first that issued from Mat's lips on the morning after Mr. Blyth's visit, as he stood alone amid the festive relics of the past evening, in the front room at Kirk Street. "To-night," he repeated to himself, as he pulled off his coat and prepared to make his toilette for the day in a pail of cold water, with the assistance of a short bar of wholesome yellow soap.

Though it was still early, his mind had been employed for some hours past in considering how the second and only difficulty, which now stood between him and the possession of the Hair Bracelet, might best be overcome. Having already procured the first requisite for executing his design, how was he next to profit by what he had gained? Knowing

that the false key would be placed in his hands that evening, how was he to open Mr. Blyth's bureau without risking discovery by the owner, or by some other person in the house.

To this important question he had as yet found no better answer than was involved in the words he had just whispered to himself, while preparing for his morning ablutions. Whether he succeeded, or whether he failed, he was determined to make the attempt on the bureau that evening. As for any definite plan, by which to guide himself, he was desperately resigned to trust for the discovery of it to the first lucky chance which might be brought about by the events of the day. "I should like though to have one good look by daylight round that place they call the Painting Room," thought Mat, still pondering inveterately on the only difficulty which now remained for him to encounter, even while he was plunging his face into two handfuls of hissing soap-suds.

He was still vigorously engaged over the pail of cold water, when a loud yawn, which died away gradually into a dreary howl, sounded from the next room, and announced that Zack was awake. In another minute the young gentleman appeared

gloomily in his night-gown at the folding doors by which the two rooms communicated. His eyes looked red-rimmed and blinking, his cheeks mottled and sodden, his hair tangled and dirty. He had one hand to his forehead, and groaning with the corners of his mouth lamentably drawn down, exhibited a shocking and salutary picture of the consequences of excessive conviviality.

"Oh Lord, Mat!" he moaned, "my head's coming in two."

"Souse it in a pail of cold water, and walk off what you can't get rid of, after that, along with me," suggested his friend.

Zack wisely took this advice. As they left Kirk-street for their walk, Mat managed that they should shape their course so as to pass Valentine's house on their way to the fields. As he had anticipated, young Thorpe proposed to call in for a minute, to see how Mr. Blyth was after the festivities of the past night, and to ascertain if he still remained in the same mind about making the drawing of Mr. Marksman's arms that evening.

"I suspect you didn't brew the Squaw's Mixture half as weak as you told us you did," said Zack silyly, when they rang at the bell. "It wasn't a bad joke

for once in a way. But really, Blyth is such a good kind-hearted fellow, it seems too bad—in short, don't let's do it next time, Mat, that's all ! ”

Mr. Marksman gruffly repudiated the slightest intention of deceiving their guest as to the strength of the liquor he had drunk. They went into the Painting Room, and found Mr. Blyth there, pale and penitent, but manfully preparing to varnish *The Golden Age*, with a very trembling hand, and a very headachy contraction of the eye-brows.

“ Ah, Zack, Zack ! I ought to lecture you about last night,” said Valentine ; “ but I have no right to say a word, for I was much the worst of the two. I'm wretchedly ill this morning, which is just what I deserve ; and heartily ashamed of myself, which is only what I ought to be. Just look at my hand ! It's all in a tremble like an old man's. Not a thimbleful of spirits shall ever pass my lips again. I'll stick to lemonade and tea for the rest of my life. No more Squaw's Mixture for *me* ! Not, my dear sir,” continued Valentine, addressing Mr. Marksman, who had been quietly stealing a glance or two at the bureau, while the painter was speaking to young Thorpe. “ Not, my dear sir, that I think of blaming you, or doubt for a moment that the drink you

kindly mixed for me would have been considered quite weak and harmless by people with stronger heads than mine. It was all my own fault, my own want of proper thoughtfulness and caution. If I misconducted myself last night, as I am afraid I did, pray make allowances —— ”

“Nonsense!” cried Zack, seeing that Mat was beginning to fidget away from Valentine, instead of returning an answer. “Nonsense! you were glorious company. We were three choice spirits, and you were number One of the social Trio. Away with Melancholy! Let’s have a temperance orgy to-night to make amends for yesterday. Do you still keep in the same mind about drawing Mat’s arms? He will be delighted to come, and so shall I; and we’ll all get virtuously uproarious this time, on nothing but toast-and-water and tea.”

“Of course I keep in the same mind,” returned Mr. Blyth. “I had my senses about me, at any rate, when I invited you and your friend here to-night. Not that I shall be able to do much, I am afraid, in the way of drawing, for a letter has come this morning to hurry me into the country. Another portrait-job has turned up, and I shall have to start to-morrow. It’s very inconvenient, and I

never in my life felt so unwilling to leave home as I do this time. I'm almost uneasy about it—I can't tell why—but I am. However, there is money to be made, so I suppose I must go."

"Why?" asked Zack, "why should you go if you don't like it? *You* don't want money."

"Ah, but I do," said Valentine. "Hush! don't say a word to Lavvie just yet" (here he sank his voice to a whisper). "I've ordered that chased-silver vase that I told you about. It's just the sort of pattern she is sure to like, and it will look lovely in her room."

"How much?" asked young Thorpe in a confidential whisper.

"Awful, Zack, thirty guineas!" replied Mr. Blyth under his breath. "Two or three portraits will cover it—that's one comfort. I've got four in prospect if I accept this job. So you see I must go away from home, whether I like it or not; or run in debt, which I haven't the courage to do. Never mind! I can get in the outline of your friend's arms to-night, and leave the rest to be done when I come back.—Shall I take that sketch down for you, my dear sir, to look at close?" continued Valentine, suddenly raising his voice, and addressing himself

to Mr. Marksman. "I venture to think it one of my most conscientious studies from actual nature."

While Mr. Blyth and Zack had been whispering together, Mat had walked away from them quietly towards one end of the room, and was now standing close to a door, lined inside with sheet iron, having bolts at top and bottom, and leading down a flight of steps from the studio into the back garden. Above this door hung a large chalk sketch of an old five-barred gate, being the identical study from nature, which, as Valentine imagined, was at that moment the special object of interest to Mat.

"No, no! don't trouble to get the sketch now," said Zack, once more answering for his friend. "We are going out to get freshened up by a long walk, and can't stop. Suppose you come with us, Blyth?"

No. Valentine could not leave his painting-room for the next two hours at least.

"You had better," urged Zack. "Nothing like exercise, when a man is as seedy as you are. Or, stop! if you won't come for a walk, what do you say to sweeping the cobwebs out of your brains with a little leap-frog in the garden? I have let you drop your practice for I don't know how long. Come on! Mat's stiff at his jumping, but he gives a famous

back." Saying this, young Thorpe ran to the end of the room, and began to unlock the garden door.

"No, no," exclaimed Mr. Blyth. "No leap-frog to-day. I can't stand violent exercise when I've got a headache. Go and take your walk, and come here at seven to-night (nobody but ourselves). I shall be all right again by that time, I hope, and delighted to see you both."

"Now then, Mat," cried Zack, "what on earth are you staring at? The garden door, or the sketch of the five-barred gate?"

"The picter, in course," answered Mr. Marksman with very unusual quickness and irritability.

"It shall be taken down for you to look at close to-night," said Mr. Blyth, delighted by the impression which the five-barred gate seemed to have produced on Mat.

"How are the ladies?" asked Zack, as he and his friend left the studio. "I say," he added in a whisper to Valentine, "does Mrs. Blyth suspect anything about the Squaw's Mixture?"

"Suspect?" repeated Valentine in amazement. Of course I told her all about it the first thing this morning."

"I shall catch it when I go upstairs to-night,"

thought Zack, wincing under this last new proof of the perfectly frank terms on which the painter and his wife lived together.

On leaving Mr. Blyth's, young Thorpe and his companion turned down a lane partially built over, which led past Valentine's back garden wall. This was their nearest way to the fields and to the high road into the country beyond. Before they had taken six steps down the lane, Mat, who had been incomprehensibly stolid and taciturn inside the house, became just as incomprehensibly curious and talkative all on a sudden outside it.

In the first place, he insisted on mounting some planks lying under Valentine's wall (to be used for the new houses that were being built in the lane), and peeping over to see what sort of a garden the painter had. Zack summarily pulled him down from his elevation by the coat-tails, but not before his quick eye had travelled over the garden, had ascended the steps leading from it to the studio, and had risen above them as high as the brass handle of the door by which they were approached from the painting-room.

In the second place, when he had been prevailed on to start fairly for the walk, Mat began to ask

questions with the same pertinacious inquisitiveness which he had already displayed on the day of the picture-show. He set out with wanting to know whether there were to be any strange visitors at Mr. Blyth's that evening; and then, on being reminded that Valentine had expressly said at parting, "Nobody but ourselves," asked if they were likely to see the painter's wife downstairs. After this inquiry had of necessity been answered in the negative, he went on to a third question, and desired to know whether "the young woman" (as he persisted in calling Madonna) might be expected to stay upstairs with Mrs. Blyth, or to show herself occasionally in the painting-room.

This question, as a matter of course, set Zack tormenting his companion with a repetition of the many bad jokes he had made already about Mat's devouring passion for Madonna. Mr. Marksman, as usual, let him go on talking nonsense to his heart's content, and managed at last by patience and perseverance to get the reply that he wanted to his inquiry. Young Thorpe, during a short lucid interval of common sense, informed him that Madonna, except under extraordinary circumstances, never came down into the studio in the evening,

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when Mr. Blyth had company there. "But cheer up, Cupid," added Zack, relapsing into nonsense again; "you shan't pine after her unpitied, if I can help it. I shall be going upstairs to see Mrs. Blyth; and I'll manage to bring her down somehow into the painting-room. You shall have your eyes dazzled, and your leathery old heart bored through and through; and then you will be perfectly qualified in every respect to figure on the long and honourable list of Madonna's admirers."

Mat took no notice whatever of this last absurd speech, but immediately proceeded with his questions.

He now wanted to know at what time Mr. Blyth and his family were accustomed to go to bed; and explained, when Zack expressed astonishment at the inquiry, that he had only asked this question in order to find out the hour at which it would be proper to take leave of their host that night. On hearing this, young Thorpe answered as readily and carelessly as usual, that the painter's family were early people, who went to bed before eleven o'clock; adding, that it was, of course, particularly necessary to leave the studio in good time on the occasion referred to, because Valentine would most probably

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start for the country next day, by one of the morning trains.

Mat's next question was preceded by a silence of a few minutes. Possibly he was thinking in what terms he might best put it. If this were the case, he certainly decided on using the briefest possible form of expression, for when he spoke again, he just asked, in so many words, what sort of a woman the painter's wife was.


Zack characteristically answered the inquiry by a torrent of his most superlative eulogies on Mrs. Blyth; and then, passing from the lady herself to the chamber that she inhabited, wound up with a magnificent and exaggerated description of the splendour of her room.

Mat listened to him attentively; then said he supposed Mrs. Blyth must be fond of curiosities, and all sorts of "knick-knack things from foreign parts." Young Thorpe not only answered the question in the affirmative, but added, as a private expression of his own opinion, that he believed these said curiosities and "knick-knacks" had helped, in their way, to keep her alive by keeping her amused. From this, he digressed to a long narrative of poor Mrs. Blyth's first illness; and having exhausted that sad subject at

last, ended by calling on Mr. Marksman to change the conversation to some less mournful topic.

But just at this point, it seemed that Mat was perversely determined to let himself lapse into another silent fit. He not only made no attempt to change the conversation, but entirely ceased asking questions ; and, indeed, hardly uttered another word of any kind, good or bad. Zack, after vainly trying to rally him into talking, lit a cigar in despair, and the two walked on together silently—Mr. Marksman having his hands in his pockets, keeping his eyes bent on the ground, and altogether burying himself, as it were, from the outer world, in the innermost recesses of a deep brown study.

As they returned, and got near Kirk Street, Mat gradually began to talk again, but only on indifferent subjects ; asking no more questions about Mr. Blyth, or any one else. They arrived at their lodgings at half-past five o'clock. Zack went into the bed-room to wash his hands. While he was thus engaged, Mr. Marksman opened that leather bag of his which has been already described as lying in the corner with the bear-skins, and taking out the feather-fan and the Indian tobacco-pouch, wrapped them up separately in paper. Having done this, he called to



Zack ; and, saying that he was about to step over to the shaving shop to get his face scraped clean before going to Mr. Blyth's, left the house with his two packages in his hand.

"If the worst comes to the worst, I'll chance it to-night with the garden door," said Mat to himself, as he took the first turning that led towards the second-hand iron shop. "This will do to get rid of the Painter Man with. And this will send Zack after him," he added, putting first the fan and then the tobacco-pouch into separate pockets of his coat. A cunning smile hovered about his lips for a moment, as he disposed of his two packages in this manner ; but it passed away again almost immediately, and was succeeded by a curious contraction and twitching of the upper part of his face. He began muttering once again that name of "Mary," which had been so often on his lips lately ; and quickened his pace mechanically, as it was always his habit to do when anything vexed or disturbed him.

When he reached the shop, the hunchback was at the door with the tin tobacco-box in his hand. On this occasion, not a single word was exchanged between the two. The squalid shopman, as the customer approached, rattled something triumphantly inside

the box, and then handed it to Mat ; and Mat put his finger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket, winked, nodded, and handed some money to the squalid shopman. The brief ceremony of giving and taking thus completed, these two originals turned away from each other without a word of farewell : the hunchback returning to his counter, and Mr. Marksman proceeding to the shaving shop.

Mat opened the box for an instant, on his way to the barber's ; and, taking out the false key (which, though made of baser metal, was almost as bright as the original), put it carefully into his waistcoat pocket. He then stopped at an oil and candle shop, and bought a wax taper and a box of matches. "The garden door's safest : I'll chance it with the garden door," thought Mr. Marksman, as he sat down in the shaving-shop chair, and ordered the barber to operate on his chin.

Punctually at seven o'clock Mr. Blyth's visitors rang at his bell. As they were shown into the hall, Mat whispered to Zack :—"This is where that old woman laid holt on you, and made such a fool of herself—aint it ?" "Yes," returned young Thorpe in his lowest tones. "But, I say, don't tell Blyth about my taking her off the other night. He's

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uncommonly fond of old Mother Peckover, and might run rusty with me, if he knew I'd been making fun of her to you."

When they entered the studio, they found Valentine all ready for them, with his drawing-board at his side, and his cartoon-sketch for the proposed new picture of Hercules bringing to King Eurystheus the Erymanthian Boar, lying rolled up at his feet. He said he had got rid of his headache, and felt perfectly well now; but Zack observed that he was not in his usual good spirits. Mat, on his side, observed nothing but the garden door, towards which he lounged carelessly as soon as the first salutations were over.

"This way, my dear sir," said Valentine, walking after him. "I've taken down the drawing you were so good as to admire this morning, as I said I would. Here it is on this painting-stand, if you would like to look at it."

Mat, whose first glance at the garden door had assured him that it was bolted and locked for the night, wheeled round immediately: and, to Mr. Blyth's great delight, inspected the sketch of the old five-barred gate with the most extraordinary and flattering attention. "Wants doing up—don't it?"

said Mat, referring to the picturesquely-ruinous original of the gate represented. "Yes, indeed," answered Valentine, thinking he spoke of the creased and ragged condition of the paper on which the sketch was made; "a morsel of paste and a sheet of fresh paper to stretch it on, would make quite another thing of it." Mat stared. "Paste and paper for a five-barred gate? A nice carpenter *you* would make!" he felt inclined to say. Zack, however, spoke at that moment: so he left the sketch, and wisely held his tongue.

"Now, then, Mat, strip to your chest, and put your arms in any position Blyth tells you. Remember you are going to be drawn as Hercules; and mind you look as if you were bringing the Erymanthian Boar to King Eurystheus, for the rest of the evening," said young Thorpe, composedly warming himself at the fire.

While Mr. Marksman awkwardly, and with many expressions of astonishment at the strange piece of service required from him by his host, divested himself of his upper garments, Valentine unrolled on the floor the paper cartoon of his classical composition; and, having refreshed his memory from it, put Mat forthwith into the position of Hercules,

with a chair to hold instead of an Erymanthian Boar, and Zack to look at as the only available representative of King Eurystheus. This done, Mr. Blyth wasted some little time, as usual, before he began to work, in looking for his drawing materials. In the course of his search over the littered studio table, he accidentally laid his hand on two envelopes with enclosures, which, after examining the addresses, he gave immediately to young Thorpe.

“Here, Zack,” said he, “these belong to you. Take them at once, and put them into your pocket; for if you leave them about in the painting-room, they are sure to be lost. The large envelope contains your permission to draw at the British Museum. The small one has a letter of introduction inside, presenting you, with my best recommendations, to my friend, Mr. Strather, a very pleasing artist, and the Curator of the Little Bilge Street Drawing Academy. You had better call to-morrow, before eleven. Mr. Strather will go with you to the Museum, and show you how to begin, and will introduce you to the drawing academy the same evening. Pray, pray, Zack, be steady and careful. Remember all you have promised your mother and

me; and show us that you are now really determined to study the Art in good earnest."

Zack expressed great gratitude for his friend's kindness, pocketed the letters, and declared, with the utmost fervour of voice and manner, that he would repair all his past faults by unflagging future industry as a student of Art. After a little longer delay, Valentine at last collected his drawing materials, and fairly began to work. As for Mat, he displayed from the first the most extraordinary and admirable steadiness as a model. His eyes might now and then stealthily wander away towards the garden door, when Mr. Blyth was not looking at him, or glance round quickly at his coat, whenever Zack happened to move near the chair on which it hung; but his body hardly varied from the right position by a hair's breadth; he rarely wanted to rest, and he never complained of cold. In short, as Valentine enthusiastically declared, he was "a perfect jewel of a sitter," a model for Hercules, whom it was a real privilege and pleasure to be able to draw from.

But while the work of the studio thus proceeded with all the smoothness and expedition that could be desired, the incidental conversation by no means kept pace with it. In spite of all that young Thorpe

could say or do, the talk lagged more and more, and grew duller and duller. Valentine was evidently out of spirits, and Hercules had stolidly abandoned himself to the most inglorious and inveterate silence. At length Zack gave up all further effort to promote the sociability of the evening, and left the painting-room to go up stairs and visit the ladies. Mat looked after him as he quitted the studio, and seemed about to speak—then glancing aside at the bureau, checked himself suddenly, and did not utter a word.

Mr. Blyth's present depression of spirits was not entirely attributable to that unwillingness to leave home, of which he had spoken in the morning to young Thorpe. He had a secret cause of uneasiness which he had not hinted at to Zack, and which happened to be intimately connected with the model whose Herculean chest and arms he was now engaged in drawing. The plain fact was, that Mr. Blyth's tender conscience smote him sorely, when he remembered the perfect trust Mrs. Thorpe placed in his promised supervision over her son, and when he afterwards reflected that he still knew as little of Zack's strange companion, as Zack did himself. His visit to Kirk Street, undertaken for the express

purpose of guarding the lad's best interests by definitely ascertaining who Mr. Marksman really was, had ended in—what he was now ashamed to dwell over, or even to call to mind. “Dear, dear me!” thought Mr. Blyth, while he worked away silently at the outline of his drawing, “how disgracefully imprudent and careless I have been! I have found out nothing, and inquired about nothing. How could I? It seems so mean and ungrateful, even to appear to suspect a man, who saved my picture only the other day, and who is now actually engaged in doing me a very great service. And yet, I promised Mrs. Thorpe—I’m in a manner responsible for Zack—I ought to find out whether this very friendly, good-natured, and useful man is fit to be trusted with him; and now he’s out of the room, I might very well do it. Might?—I will!” And, acting immediately on this conscientious resolve, simple-hearted Mr. Blyth actually set himself to ask cunning Mr. Marksman, in delicate and circumlocutory terms, the important question of who he really was!


Mat was candour itself in answering all inquiries that related to his wanderings over the American Continent. He confessed with the utmost frankness that he had been sent to sea, as a wild boy whom it

was impossible to keep steady at home; and he quite readily admitted that he had not introduced himself to Zack under his real name. But at this point his communicativeness stopped. He did not quibble, or prevaricate; he just bluntly and simply declared that he would tell nothing more than he had told already. "I said to the young 'un," concluded Mat, "when first we come together, 'I hav'n't heard the sound of my own name for better than twenty year past; and I don't care if I never hear it again.' That's what I said to *him*. That's what I say to *you*. I'm a rough 'un, I know; but I hav'n't broke out of prison, or cheated the gallows—"

"My dear sir," interposed Valentine, eagerly and alarmedly, "pray don't imagine any such offensive ideas ever entered my head! I might perhaps have thought that family troubles—" "That's it," Mat broke in quickly. "Family troubles. Drop it there; and you'll leave it right."

Upon this, Mr. Blyth very abruptly and confusedly changed the conversation, and began to talk about Zack, whose increasing taste for the nightly consumption of strong liquor in large quantities, the painter viewed with considerable apprehension. He would have expressed this in so many words to

Mat ; but certain remembrances connected with the Squaw's Mixture, and its train of convivial consequences, tied his tongue. So he confined himself to speaking generally of young Thorpe's future prospects ; and endeavoured to impress on Mr. Marksman the necessity of using his great influence over the lad, so as to lead him into such steady courses as might end in making him, not only a successful artist, but also a respectable man. Mat listened to his host's discourse with every appearance of attention ; but his eyes began, nevertheless, to twinkle impatiently as they still turned every now and then towards the garden door ; and, when it came to his turn to speak, he asked some questions on the subject of successful artists and respectable men in general, which showed such dense ignorance of accepted social conventions and established social creeds, that Mr. Blyth found it perplexing in the last degree to meet them with any species of adequate reply. Indeed, considering Mat's capacity for making awkward inquiries, and Valentine's incapacity for defining abstract ideas, it was, perhaps, upon the whole, equally fortunate for both of them that their colloquy was interrupted, just as it was involving them in the most inextricable mutual



bewilderment, by the return of young Thorpe to the studio.

Zack announced the approaching arrival of the supper-tray; and warned "Hercules" to let go of the Erymanthian Boar, and cover up his neck and shoulders immediately, unless he wished to frighten the housemaid out of her wits. At this hint, Mr. Blyth laid aside his drawing-board, and Mr. Marksman put on his flannel waistcoat; not listening the while to one word of the many fervent expressions of gratitude addressed to him by the painter, but appearing to be in a violent hurry to array himself in his coat again. As soon as he had got it on, he put his hand in one of the pockets, and looked hard at Valentine—but just then the servant came in with the tray; upon which he turned round impatiently, and walked away once again to the lower end of the room.

When the door had closed on the departing housemaid, he returned to Mr. Blyth with the feather-fan in his hand; and saying, in his usual gruff, down-right way, that he had heard from Zack of Mrs. Blyth's invalid condition, and of her fondness for curiosities, bluntly asked the painter if he thought his wife would like such a fan as that now produced.

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Valentine, who did not feel quite comfortable after the defeat he had suffered in trying to ascertain Mr. Marksman's origin, and who also naturally doubted the propriety of letting his wife accept a present from a man who was little better than a perfect stranger—hesitated, stammered, and tried to gain time by beginning to admire the fan. He was unceremoniously interrupted, however, by his queer visitor, before he could utter three consecutive words. "I got that for a woman in the old country, many a long year ago," said Mat, pressing the fan roughly into Mr. Blyth's hands. "When I come back, and thought for to give it her, she was dead and gone. There's not another woman in England as cares about me, or knows about me. If you're too proud to let your wife have the thing, throw it into the fire. I hav'n't got nobody to give it to; and I can't keep it by me, and won't keep it by me, no longer."

In the utterance of these words there was a certain rough pathos and bitter reference to past calamity which touched Valentine in one of his tender places. His generous instincts overcame his prudent reflections in a moment; and moved him, not merely to accept the present, but also to predict warmly that Mrs. Blyth would be delighted with it.

"Zack," said he, speaking in an undertone to young Thorpe, who had been listening to Mat's last speech, and observing his production of the fan, in silent curiosity and surprise. "Zack, I'll run up stairs with the fan to Lavvie at once, so as not to seem careless about your friend's present. Mind you do the honours of the supper-table—such as it is!—with proper hospitality, while I am away."

Speaking these words, Mr. Blyth bustled out of the room as nimbly as usual. A minute or two after his departure, Mat put his hand into his pocket once more; mysteriously approached young Thorpe, and opened before him the paper containing the Indian tobacco-pouch, which was made of scarlet cloth, and was very prettily decorated with coloured beads.

"Do you think the young woman would fancy this?" he said. "I'd have asked *him* (referring by the last word to Valentine); but he looked so queer at the feather-thing, and bolted in such a hurry—"

Here Zack, with a shout of laughter, interrupted him by snatching the pouch out of his hands; and began to quiz his friend more unmercifully than ever. For the first time, Mat seemed irritated by his bad jokes about courting a civilised young lady

by means of a savage tobacco-pouch; and cut him short quite fiercely with a frown and an oath.

"Don't swear, Don Juan!" cried Zack with incorrigible levity. "I'll take it up to her; and, if Blyth will let her have it, I'll manage to get her down stairs somehow. Oh, what a sight it will be to see the leathery old boy trying to make soft eyes at Madonna!" Saying this, young Thorpe ran laughing out of the room, with the scarlet pouch in his hand.

Mat listened intently till the sound of Zack's rapid footsteps died away upstairs—then walked quickly and softly down the studio to the garden door—gently unlocked it—gently drew the bolts back—gently opened it, and ascertained that it could also be opened from without, merely by turning the handle—then, quietly closing it again, left it, to all appearance, as fast for the night as before, provided no one went near enough, or had sufficiently sharp eyes, to observe that it was neither bolted nor locked.

"Now for the big chest!" thought Mat, taking the false key out of his pocket, and hastening back to the bureau. "If Zack or the Painter Man come down before I've time to get at the drawer inside,

I've secured my second chance after they're all in bed with the garden door."

He had the key in the lock as this thought passed through his mind. He was just about to turn it, when the sound of rapidly-descending footsteps upon the stairs, struck on his quick ear.

"Too late!" muttered Mat. "I must chance it, after all, with the garden door."

Putting the key into his pocket again, as he said this, he walked back to the fire-place. The moment after he got there, Mr. Blyth entered the studio.

"I am quite shocked that you should have been so unceremoniously left alone," said Valentine, whose naturally courteous nature prompted him to be just as scrupulously polite in his behaviour to his rough guest, as if Mr. Marksman had been a civilised gentleman of the most refined feeling, and the most exalted rank. "I am so sorry you should have been left, through Zack's carelessness, without anybody to ask you to take a little supper," continued Valentine, turning to the table. "Mrs. Blyth, my dear sir, (do take a sandwich!) desires me to express her best thanks for your very pretty present (that is the brandy in the bottle next to you).

She admires the design (sponge-cake? Ah, you don't care about sweets) and thinks the colour of the centre feathers—"

At this moment, the door opened, and Mr. Blyth, abruptly closing his lips, looked towards it with an expression of the blankest astonishment; for he beheld Madonna entering the painting-room in company with Zack.

Valentine had been persuaded to let the deaf and dumb girl accept the scarlet pouch, by his wife; but neither she nor Zack had said a word before him, upstairs, about taking Madonna into the studio. The plain fact was that young Thorpe had warily abstained from mentioning the not over-wise project which he had now executed (and which he knew would have been summarily opposed by Mr. Blyth), until the painter had hastened away downstairs, to pay the proper hospitable attentions to his guest. When he was well out of earshot, Zack confided to Mrs. Blyth the new freak in which he wanted to engage, predicted that it would produce a fresh fund of amusement at Mat's expense, declared that one of the ladies was bound in common gratitude to make a personal acknowledgment of the receipt of his friend's presents, and, signing unscrupulously to


Madonna that she was wanted in the studio, to be presented to the "generous man who had given her the tobacco-pouch," took her out of the room without stopping to hear to the end the somewhat faint remonstrance by which his proposition was met. To confess the truth, Mrs. Blyth, seeing no great impropriety in the girl's being introduced to the stranger—while Valentine was present in the room; and having moreover a very strong curiosity to hear all she could about Zack's odd companion, was secretly anxious to ascertain what impressions Madonna would bring away of Mat's personal appearance and manners. Though she would not, on this account, say Yes, to the somewhat venturesome proposal submitted to her, she did not, on the other hand, say No as authoritatively as she might. And thus it was that Zack, by seizing his opportunity at the right moment, and exerting a little of that cool assurance in which he was never very deficient, now actually entered the painting-room in a glow of mischievous triumph, with Madonna on his arm.

Valentine gave him a look as he entered, which he found it convenient not to appear to see. The painter felt strongly inclined, at that moment, to

send his adopted child upstairs again directly; but he restrained himself out of a feeling of delicacy towards his guest—for Mr. Marksman had not only seen Madonna, but had advanced a step or two to meet her, the instant she came into the room.

Zack, feeling that he had displeased Mr. Blyth, and that he should be told so at the first convenient opportunity, determined, in his reckless way, that it was now too late to draw back, and that he might just as well pursue his freak to the end, being now sure of receiving his merited reproof under any circumstances. Accordingly, he led Madonna up to Mat (who had suddenly and confusedly stopped, after advancing two or three steps from the supper table), with the malicious intention of bewildering his uncultivated friend, by going through all the most elaborate ceremonies of a formal introduction. He was foiled in his purpose, though, unexpectedly enough, and at the very nick of time, by no less a person than Madonna herself.

Few social tests for analysing female human nature can be more safely relied on than that which the moral investigator may easily apply, by observing how a woman conducts herself towards a man who shows symptoms of confusion on approaching her



for the first time. If she has nothing at all in her, she awkwardly forgets the advantage of her sex, and grows more confused than he is: if she has nothing but brains in her, she cruelly abuses the advantage, and treats him with quiet contempt: if she has plenty of heart in her, she instinctively turns the advantage to its right use, and forthwith sets him at his ease by the timely charity of a word, or the mute encouragement of a look.

Now, Madonna, perceiving that Mr. Marksman showed evident signs, on approaching her, of what appeared like confusion to her apprehension, quietly drew her arm out of Zack's, and, to his unmeasured astonishment, stepped forward in front of him,—looked up brightly into the grim scarred face of Mat—dropped her usual curtsy, wrote a line hurriedly on her slate, then offered it to him with a smile and a nod, to read if he pleased, and to write on in return.

“By George!” exclaimed Zack, giving vent to his amazement; “she has taken to old Rough and Tough, and made him a prime favourite at first sight. Who would ever have thought it?”

Valentine was standing near, but he did not appear to hear this speech. He was watching Mr. Marksman

and Madonna closely and curiously. Accustomed as he was to the innocent candour with which the deaf and dumb girl always showed her approval or dislike of strangers at a first interview—as also to her apparent perversity in often displaying a decided liking for the very people whose looks and manners had been previously considered certain to displease her—he was now almost as much surprised as Zack, when he witnessed her greeting to Mr. Marksman. It was an infallible sign of Madonna's approval, if she followed up an introduction by handing her slate of her own accord to a stranger. When she was presented to people whom she disliked, she invariably kept it by her side until it was formally asked for.

Eccentric in everything else, Mat was consistently eccentric even in his confusion. Some men who are bashful in a young lady's presence, show it by blushing—Mat's colour sank instead of rising. Other men, similarly affected, betray their burdensome modesty, by fidgeting incessantly—Mat was as still as a statue. His eyes wandered heavily and vacantly over the girl, beginning with her soft brown hair, then resting for a moment on her face, then descending to the gay pink ribbon on her breast, and to her

crisp black silk apron with its smart lace pockets,—then dropping at last to her neat little shoes, and to the thin bright line of white stocking that just separated them from the hem of her favourite grey dress. He only looked up again, when she touched his hand, and put her slate pencil into it. At that signal, he raised his eyes once more, read the line she had written to thank him for the scarlet pouch, and tried to write something in return. But his hand shook, and his thoughts (if he had any) seemed to fail him. He gave her back the slate and pencil, looking her full in the eyes as he did so. A curious change came over his face at the same time—a change like that which had altered him so remarkably in the hosier's shop at Dibbledean.

“Zack might, after all, have made many a worse friend than this man,” thought Mr. Blyth, still attentively observing Mat. “Vagabonds don't behave in the presence of young girls as he is behaving now.”

With this idea in his mind, Valentine advanced to help Mr. Marksman in his bewilderment by showing him how to communicate with Madonna. He was interrupted, however, by young Thorpe, who, the moment he recovered from his first sensations of

surprise, began to talk nonsense again, at the top of his voice, with the mischievous intention of increasing Mat's embarrassment.

While Mr. Blyth was attempting to silence Zack by leading him to the supper table, Madonna was trying her best, in a new way, to re-assure the great bulky, sunburnt man who seemed to be absolutely afraid of her! She moved to a stool, which stood near a second table in a corner by the fire-place; and sitting down, produced the scarlet pouch, intimating by a gesture that Mat was to look at what she was now doing. She then laid the pouch open on her lap, and put into it several little work-box toys, a Tonbridge silk-reel, an ivory needle case, a silver thimble with an enamelled rim, a tiny pair of scissors, and other things of the same kind—which she took first from one pocket of her apron and then from another. While she was engaged in filling the pouch, Zack, standing at the supper-table, drummed on the floor with his foot to attract her attention, and interrogatively held up a decanter of wine and a glass. She started as the sound struck on her delicate nerves; and, looking at young Thorpe directly, signed that she did not wish for any wine. The sudden movement of her body thus occasioned,



shook off her lap a little mother-of-pearl bodkin case, which lay more than half out of one of the pockets of her apron. The bodkin case rolled under the stool, without her seeing it, for she was looking towards the supper-table: without being observed by Mat, for his eyes were following the direction of her's: without being heard by Mr. Blyth, for Zack was, as usual, chattering and making a noise.


When she had put two other little toys that remained in her pockets into the pouch, she drew the mouth of it tight, passed the loops of the loose thongs that fastened it, over one of her arms, and then, rising to her feet, pointed to it, and looked at Mr. Marksman with a very significant nod. The action expressed the idea she wished to communicate, plainly enough:—"See," it seemed to say, "see what a pretty work-bag I can make of your tobacco-pouch!"

But Mat, to all appearance, was not able to find out the meaning of one of her gestures, easy as they were to interpret. His senses seemed to grow more and more perturbed the longer he looked at her. As she curtseyed to him again, and moved away in despair, he stepped forward a little, and suddenly and awkwardly held out his hand. "The big man

seems to be getting a little less afraid of me," thought Madonna, turning directly, and meeting his clumsy advance towards her, with a smile. But the instant he took her hand, her lips closed, and she shivered through her whole body as if dead fingers had touched her. "Oh!" she thought now, "how cold his hand is! how cold his hand is!"

"If I hadn't felt her warm to touch, I should have got dreaming to-night that I'd seen Mary's ghost." This was the grim fancy which darkly troubled Mat's mind, at the very same moment when Madonna was thinking how cold his hand was. He turned away impatiently from some wine offered to him just then by Zack; and, looking vacantly into the fire, drew his coat-cuff several times over his eyes and forehead.

The chill from the strange man's hand still lingered icily about Madonna's fingers, and made her anxious, though she hardly knew why, to leave the room. She advanced hastily to Valentine, and made the sign which indicated Mrs. Blyth, by laying her hand on her heart; she then pointed up-stairs. Valentine, understanding what she wanted, gave her leave directly to return to his wife's room. Before Zack could make even a gesture to detain her, she



had slipped out of the studio, after not having remained in it much longer than five minutes.

"Zack," whispered Mr. Blyth, as the door closed, "I'm anything but pleased with you for bringing Madonna downstairs. You have broken through all rule in doing so ; and, besides that, you have confused your friend by introducing her to him without any warning or preparation."

"Oh, that's not of the slightest consequence," interrupted young Thorpe. "He's not the sort of man to want warning about anything. I apologise for breaking rules ; but as for Mat—why, hang it, Blyth, it's plain enough what has been wrong with him since supper came in ! He's fairly knocked up with doing Hercules for you. You have kept the poor old Guy for near two hours standing in one position, without a rag on his back ; and then you wonder ——"

"Bless my soul ! that never occurred to me. I'm afraid you're right," exclaimed Valentine. "Do let us make him take something hot and comfortable ! Dear, dear me ! how ought one to mix grog ?" Mr. Blyth had been for some little time past trying his best to compound a species of fiery and potential Squaw's Mixture for Mat. He had begun the attempt

some minutes before Madonna left the studio ; having previously found it useless to offer any explanations to his inattentive guest of the meaning of the girl's signs and gestures with the slate and tobacco-pouch. He had persevered in his hospitable endeavour all through the whispered dialogue which had just passed between Zack and himself; and he had now filled the glass nearly to the brim, when it suddenly occurred to him that he had put sherry in at the top of the tumbler, after having begun with brandy at the bottom ; and also that he had altogether forgotten some important ingredient which he was, just then, perfectly incapable of calling to mind.

“ Here, Mat ! ” cried Zack. “ Come and mix yourself something hot. Blyth's been trying to do it for you, and can't.”

Mr. Marksman, who had been staring more and more vacantly into the fire all this time, turned round again at last towards his friends at the supper table. He started a little when he saw that Madonna was no longer in the room—then looked aside from the door by which she had departed, to the bureau. He had been pretty obstinately determined to get possession of the Hair Bracelet from the first : but he was doubly and trebly determined now.

"It's no use looking about for the young lady," said Zack; "you behaved so clumsily and queerly, that you frightened her out of the room."

"No, no! nothing of the sort," interposed Valentine, good-naturedly. "Pray take something to warm you. I am quite ashamed of my want of consideration in keeping you standing so long for Hercules, when I ought to have remembered that you were not used to being a painter's model. I hope I have not given you cold——"

"Given me cold?" repeated Mat, amazedly. He seemed about to add a sufficiently strong and indignant assertion of his superiority to any such civilised bodily weakness, as a liability to catch cold. But just as the words were on his lips, he looked fixedly at Mr. Blyth, and checked himself.

"I am afraid you must be tired with the long sitting you have so kindly given me," added Valentine.

"No," answered Mat, after a moment's consideration; "not tired. Only sleepy. I'd best go home. What's o'clock?"

A reference to young Thorpe's watch showed that it was ten minutes past ten. Mat held out his hand directly to take leave; but Valentine positively

refused to let him depart until he had helped himself to something from the supper table. Hearing this, he poured out a glass of brandy and drank it off; then held out his hand once more, and said good night.

“Well, I won’t press you to stay against your will,” said Mr. Blyth, rather mournfully. “I will only thank you again most heartily for your kindness in sitting to me, and say that I hope to see you again, when I return from the country. Good bye, Zack. I shall start in the morning by an early train. The sooner I finish these new portrait jobs, and get home again, the better I shall be pleased. Pray, my dear boy, be steady, and remember your mother and your promises, and call on Mr. Strather in good time to-morrow, and stick to your work, Zack—for all our sakes, stick to your work!”

As they left the studio, Mat cast one parting glance at the garden door. Would the servant, who had most likely bolted and locked it early in the evening, go near it again, before she went to bed? Would Mr. Blyth walk to the bottom of the room to see that the door was safe, after he had raked the fire out?—Important questions these, which only the events of the night could answer.

Zack hardly waited until he and his friend had got out into the road, before he began to ridicule Mat's clumsy and helpless behaviour in Madonna's presence, with all the powers of sarcasm that he had at his disposal. Mr. Marksman let him talk as long as he pleased, and hardly favoured him in return with so much as a word of answer. The usual result of allowing him to run on unchecked in this way, soon arrived. Young Thorpe's vein of satire was all but exhausted before they got home, for want of the timely repression of an occasional reply.

A little way down Kirk Street, at the end by which they now entered it, stood the local Theatre, all ablaze with dazzling gas, and all astir with loitering blackguards. Zack stopped, as he and his companion passed under the portico, on the way to their lodgings further up the street.

"It's only half-past ten, now," said he. "I shall drop in here, and see the last bit of the pantomime. Won't you come, too?"

"No," said Mat; "I'm too sleepy. I shall go on home."

They separated. While Zack entered the Theatre, Mr. Marksman proceeded steadily in the direction of the tobacco-shop. As soon, however, as he was well

out of the glare of gas from the Theatre door, he crossed the street; and, returning quickly by the opposite side of the way, took the road that led to Valentine's house.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HAIR BRACELET.

MR. BLYTH'S spirits sank apace, as he bolted and locked the front door, when his guests had left him. He was never quite so lively as usual at other times, when on the point of leaving home ; but no depression at all comparable in intensity to that which he now exhibited, had ever got possession of him on the eve of any past travelling expedition whatever. He actually sighed as he now took a turn or two alone, up and down the studio.

Three times did he approach close to the garden door, as he walked slowly from end to end of the room. But he never once looked up at it. His thoughts were wandering after Zack, and Zack's friend ; and his attention was keeping them company. "Whoever this Mr. Marksman may be," mused Valentine, stopping at the fourth turn, and walking

up to the fire-place ; " I don't believe there's anything bad about him ; and so I shall tell Mrs. Thorpe the next time I see her."

He set himself to rake out the fire, leaving only a few red embers and tiny morsels of coal to flame up fitfully from time to time in the bottom of the grate. Having done this, he stood and warmed himself for a little while, and tried to whistle his favourite "Drops of Brandy." The attempt was a total failure. He broke down at the third bar, and ended lamentably in another sigh.

"What can be the matter with me? I never felt so down in the mouth about going away from home before." Puzzling himself uselessly with such reflections as these, he went to the supper-table, and drank a glass of wine, picked a bit of a sandwich, and unnecessarily spoilt the appearance of two sponge cakes, by absently breaking a small piece off each of them. He was in no better humour for eating or drinking, than for whistling "Drops of Brandy;" so he wisely determined to light his candle forthwith, and go to bed.

After extinguishing the lights that had been burning on the supper-table, he just cast a parting glance all round the room, and was then

about to leave it, when the drawing of the old five-barred gate, which he had taken down for Mat to look at, and had placed on a painting-stand at the lower end of the studio, caught his eye. He advanced towards it directly ; but stopped half-way—hesitated—yawned—shivered a little—thought to himself that it was not worth while to trouble about hanging the drawing up over the garden door, that night—and so, yawning again, turned on his heel, and left the studio.

Mr. Blyth's two servants slept up-stairs. About ten minutes after their master had ascended to his bedroom, they left the kitchen for their dormitory on the garret floor. Patty, the housemaid, stopped as she passed the painting room, to look in, and see that the lights were out, and the fire safe for the night. Polly, the cook, went on with the bedroom candle ; and, after having ascended the stairs as far as the first landing from the hall, discreetly bethought herself of the garden door, the general care and superintendence of which was properly attached to her department in the household.

" I say, did you lock the garden door ? " said Polly to Patty, through the banisters.

" Yes ; I did it when I took up master's tea,"

said Patty to Polly, appearing lazily in the hall, after one sleepy look round the fast-darkening studio.

"Hadn't you better see to it again, to make sure?" suggested the cautious cook.

"Hadn't *you*? It's *your* place," retorted the careless housemaid.

"Hush!" whispered Valentine, suddenly appearing on the landing above Polly, from his bedroom, arrayed in his flannel dressing-gown and nightcap. "Don't talk here, or you'll disturb your mistress. Go up to bed; and talk there. Good night."

"Good night, sir," answered together the two faithful female dependants of the house of Blyth, obeying their master's order with simpering docility, and deferring to a future opportunity all further considerations connected with the garden door.

The fire was fading out fast in the studio grate. Now and then, at long intervals, a thin tongue of flame leapt up faintly against the ever-invading gloom, flickered for an instant over the brighter and more prominent objects in the room, then dropped back again into darkness. The profound silence was only interrupted by those weird house-noises which live in the death of night, and die in the life of day;

by that sudden crackling in the wall, by that mysterious creaking in the furniture, by those still small ghostly sounds from inanimate bodies, which we have all been startled by, over and over again, while lingering at our book after the rest of the family are asleep in bed, while waiting up for a friend who is out late, or while watching alone through the dark hours in a sick chamber. Excepting such occasional night-noises as these, so familiar, yet always so strange, the perfect tranquillity of the studio remained undisturbed for nearly an hour after Mr. Blyth had left it. No neighbours came home in cabs, no bawling drunken men wandered into the remote country fastnesses of the new suburb. The night-breeze, blowing in from the fields, was too light to be audible. The watch-dog in the nurseryman's garden hard by, was as quiet on this particular night as if he had actually barked himself dumb at last. Outside the house, as well as inside, the drowsy reign of old primeval Quiet was undisturbed by the innovating vagaries of the rebel, Noise.

Undisturbed till the clock in the hall pointed to a quarter past eleven. Then there came softly and slowly up the iron stairs that led from the back garden to the studio, a sound of footsteps. When

these ceased, the door at the lower end of the room was opened gently from outside, and the black bulky figure of Mr. Matthew Marksman appeared on the threshold, lowering out gloomily against a back-ground of starry sky.

He stepped into the painting-room, and closed the door quietly behind him; stood listening anxiously in the darkness for a moment or two; then pulling from his pocket the wax taper and the matches which he had bought that afternoon, immediately provided himself with a light.

While the wick of the taper was burning up, he listened again. Except the sound of his own heavy breathing all was quiet around him. He advanced at once to the bureau, starting involuntarily as he brushed by Mr. Blyth's lay figure with the Spanish hat and the Roman toga; and cursing it under his breath for standing in his way, as if it had been a living creature. The door leading from the studio into the passage of the house was not quite closed; but he never noticed this as he passed to the bureau, though it stood close to the chink left between the door and the post. He had the false key in his hand; he knew that he should be in possession of the Hair Bracelet in another moment; and his

impatience for once getting the better of his cunning and coolness, he pounced on the bureau, without looking either to the right or the left.

He had unlocked it, had pulled open the inner drawer, had taken out the Hair Bracelet, and was just holding his lighted taper to it, to examine it closely (after having locked the bureau again), when a faint sound on the stair-case of the house caught his ear.

At the same instant, a thin streak of candle-light flashed on him through the narrow chink between the hardly-closed door and the doorpost. It increased rapidly in intensity as the sound of softly-advancing footsteps now grew more and more distinct from the stone passage leading to the interior of the house.

He had the presence of mind to extinguish his taper, to thrust the Hair Bracelet into his pocket, and to move across softly from the bureau (which stood against the lock-side doorpost), to the wall (which was by the hinge-side doorpost), so that the door itself might open back upon him, and thus keep him concealed from the view of any person entering the room. He had the presence of mind to take these precautions instantly ; but he had not self-control

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enough to suppress the involuntary exclamation which burst from his lips at the moment when the thin streak of candle-light first flashed into his eyes. A violent spasmodic action contracted the muscles of his throat; he clenched his fist in a fury of suppressed rage against himself, as he felt that his own voice had turned traitor and betrayed him.

The light came close: the door opened—opened gently, till it just touched him as he stood with his back against the wall.

For one instant his heart stopped; the next, it burst into action again with a heave, and the blood rushed hotly through every vein all over him, from head to foot, as his wrought-up nerves of mind and body relaxed together under a sense of ineffable relief. He was saved almost by a miracle from the inevitable consequence of the rash exclamation that had escaped him. It was Madonna who had opened the door—it was the deaf and dumb girl whom he now saw walking into the studio.

She had been taking her working materials out of the tobacco-pouch, in her own room, before going to bed, and had then missed her mother-of-pearl bodkin-case. Suspecting immediately that she must have dropped it in the studio, and fearing that it

might be trodden on and crushed if she left it there until the next morning, she had now stolen downstairs by herself to look for it. Her hair, not yet put up for the night, was combed back from her face, and lightly hung down in long silky folds over her shoulders. Her complexion looked more exquisitely clear and pure than ever, set off as it was by the white dressing-gown which now clothed her. She had a pretty little red and blue china candlestick, given to her by Mrs. Blyth, in her hand ; and, holding the light above her, advanced slowly from the studio doorway, with her eyes bent on the ground, searching anxiously for the missing bodkin-case.

Mat's resolution was taken the moment he caught sight of her. He never stirred an inch from his place of concealment, until she had advanced three or four paces into the room, and had her back turned full upon him. Then quietly stepping a little forward from the door, but still keeping well behind her, he blew out her candle, just as she was raising it over her head, and looking down intently on the floor in front of her.

He had calculated, rightly enough, on being able to execute this manœuvre with impunity from

discovery, knowing that she was incapable of hearing the sound of his breath when he blew her candle out, and that the darkness would afterwards not only effectually shield him from detection, but also oblige her to leave him alone in the room again, while she went to get another light. He had not calculated, however, on the serious effect which the performance of his stratagem would have upon her nerves, for he knew nothing of the horror which the loss of her sense of hearing caused her always to feel when she was left in darkness; and he had not stopped to consider that by depriving her of her light, he was depriving her of that all-important guiding sense of sight, the loss of which she could not supply in the dark, as others could, by the exercise of the ear.

The instant he blew her candle out, she dropped the china candlestick in a paroxysm of terror. It fell, and broke, with a deadened sound, on one of the many portfolios lying on the floor about her. He had hardly time to hear this happen, before the dumb moaning, the inarticulate cry of fear,—which was all that the poor panic-stricken girl could utter,—rose low, shuddering, and ceaseless, in the darkness, so close at his ear, that he fancied he could feel

her breath palpitating quick and warm on his cheek.

If she should touch him? If she should be sensible of the motion of *his* foot on the floor, as she had been sensible of the motion of Zack's, when young Thorpe offered her the glass of wine at supper-time? It was a risk to remain still—it was a risk to move! He stood as helpless even as the helpless creature near him. That low, ceaseless, dumb moaning, neither varied nor overcome by any other sound, to show that she was moving to get out of the room, smote so painfully on his heart, roused up so fearfully the rude superstitious fancies lying in wait within him, in connection with the lost and dead Mary Grice, that the sweat broke out on his face, the coldness of sharp mental suffering seized on his limbs, the fever of unutterable expectations parched up his throat and mouth and lips; and for the first time, perhaps, in his existence, he felt the chillness of mortal dread running through him to his very soul—he, who amid perils of seas and wildernesses, and horrors of hunger and thirst, had played familiarly with his own life for more than twenty years past, as a child plays familiarly with an old toy.

He knew not how long it was before the dumb

moaning seemed to grow fainter; to be less fearfully close to him; to change into what sounded, at one moment, like a shivering of her whole body; at another, like a rustling of her garments; at a third, like a slow scraping of her hands over the table on the other side of her, and of her feet over the floor. She had summoned courage enough at last to move, and to grope her way out—he knew it as he listened. He heard her touch the edge of the half-opened door; he heard the still sound of her first footfall on the stone passage outside; then the noise of her hand drawn along the wall; then the far lessening gasps of her affrighted breathing as she gained the stairs.

When she was gone, and the change and comfort of silence and solitude stole over him, his power of thinking, his cunning and resolution began to return. Listening yet a little while, and hearing no sound of any disturbance among the sleepers in the house, he ventured to light one of his matches; and, by the brief flicker that it afforded, picked his way noiselessly through the lumber in the studio, and gained the garden door. In a minute he was out again in the open air. In a minute more, he had got over the garden wall, and was walking freely along the

lonely road of the new suburb, with the Hair Bracelet safe in his pocket.

At first, he did not attempt to take it out and examine it. He had not felt the slightest scruple beforehand; he did not feel the slightest remorse now, in connection with the Bracelet, and with his manner of obtaining possession of it. Callous, however, as he was in this direction, he was sensitive in another. There was both regret and repentance in him, as he thought of the deaf and dumb girl, and of the paroxysm of terror that he had caused her. How patiently and prettily she had tried to explain to him her gratitude for his gift, and the use she meant to put it to; and how cruelly he had made her suffer in return! "I wish I hadn't frightened her so," said Mat to himself, thinking of this in his own rough way, as he walked rapidly homewards. "I wish I hadn't frightened her so."

But his impatience to examine the Bracelet got the better of his repentance, as it had already got the better of every other thought and feeling in him. He stopped under a gas lamp, and drew his prize out of his pocket. He could see that it was made of two kinds of hair, and that something was engraved on the flat gold of the clasp. But his hand shook,

his eyes were dimmer than usual, the light was too high above him, and try as he might he could make out nothing clearly.

He put the Bracelet into his pocket again, and, muttering to himself impatiently, made for Kirk Street at his utmost speed. The tobacconist's wife happened to be in the passage when he opened the door. Without the ceremony of a single preliminary word, he astonished her by taking her candle out of her hand, and instantly disappearing up-stairs with it. Zack had not come from the theatre—he had the lodgings to himself—he could examine the Hair Bracelet in perfect freedom.

His first look was at the clasp. By holding it close to the flame of the candle he succeeded in reading the letters engraved on it.

“M. G. In memory of S. G.”

“*Mary Grice. In memory of Susan Grice.*”

Mat's hand closed fast on the Bracelet—and dropped heavily on his knee, as he uttered those words.

* * * *

The pantomime which Zack had gone to see, was so lengthened out by encores of incidental songs and dances, that it was not over till close on midnight. When he left the theatre, the physical consequences

of breathing a vitiated atmosphere made themselves felt immediately in the regions of his mouth, throat, and stomach. Those ardent aspirations in the direction of shell-fish and malt liquor, which it is especially the mission of the Drama to create, glowed in his breast as soon as he issued into the fresh air, and took him to the local oyster shop for refreshment and change of scene.

Having the immediate prospect of the British Museum, and Mr. Strather of the Little Bilge Street Drawing Academy, vividly and menacingly present before his eyes, Zack thought of the future for once in his life, and astonished the ministering vassals of the oyster shop (with all of whom he was on terms of intimate friendship), by enjoying himself with exemplary moderation at the festive board. When he had done supper, and was on his way to bed at the tobacconist's across the road, it is actually not too much to say that he was sober and subdued enough to have borne inspection by the President and Council of the Royal Academy, as a highly respectable student of the Fine Arts.

It surprised him a little not to hear his friend snoring when he let himself into the passage—and it astonished him very considerably, when he entered

the front room, to see the employment on which Mr. Marksman was engaged.

Mat was sitting by the table, with his rifle laid across his knees, and was scouring the barrel bright with a piece of sand paper. By his side was an unsnuffed candle, an empty bottle, and a tumbler with a little raw brandy left in the bottom of it. His face, when he looked up, showed that he had been drinking hard. There was a stare in his eyes that was at once fierce and vacant, and a hard, fixed, unnatural smile on his lips which Zack did not at all like to see.

"Why, Mat, old boy!" said he soothingly, "you look a little out of sorts. What's wrong?"

Mat scoured away at the barrel of the gun harder than ever, and gave no answer.

"What, in the name of wonder, can you be scouring your rifle for, to-night?" continued young Thorpe. "You have never yet touched it since you brought it into the house. What can you possibly want with it now? We don't shoot birds in England with rifle bullets."

"A rifle bullet will do for *my* game, if I put it up," said Mat, suddenly and fiercely fixing his eyes on Zack.

"What game does he mean?" thought young Thorpe. "He's been drinking himself pretty nearly drunk. Can anything have happened to him since we parted company at the theatre?—I should like to find out; but he's such a d—d old savage when the brandy's in his head, that I don't half like to pump him ——"

Here Zack's reflections were interrupted by the voice of his eccentric friend.

"Did you ever meet with a man of the name of Carr?" asked Mat. He looked away from young Thorpe, keeping his eyes steadily on the rifle, and rubbing hard at the barrel, as he put this question.

"No," said Zack. "Not that I can remember."

Mat left off cleaning the gun, and began to fumble awkwardly in one of his pockets. After some little time, he produced what appeared to Zack to be an inordinately long letter, written in a cramped hand, and superscribed apparently with two long lines of inscription, instead of an ordinary address. Opening this strange-looking document, Mat guided himself a little way down the lines on the first page with a very unsteady forefinger—stopped, and read something anxiously and with evident difficulty—then put the letter back in his pocket, dropped his eyes

once more on the gun in his lap, and said, with a strong emphasis on the Christian name :—

“*Arthur Carr?*”

“No,” returned Zack. “I never met with a man of that name. Is he a friend of yours?”

Mat went on scouring the rifle-barrel.

Young Thorpe said nothing more. He had been a little puzzled early in the evening, when his friend had exhibited the fan and tobacco pouch (neither of which had been ever produced before), and had mentioned to Mr. Blyth that they were once intended for “a woman” who was now dead, (to which “woman” Mat had never previously alluded, even in the bachelor familiarity of the lodgings in Kirk Street). Zack had thought this conduct rather odd at the time; but now, when it was followed by these strangely abrupt references to the name of Carr, by this mysterious scouring of the rifle, and desperate brandy drinking in solitude, he began to feel perplexed in the last degree about Mat’s behaviour. “Is this about Arthur Carr a secret of the old boy’s?” Zack asked himself with a sort of bewildered curiosity. “Is he letting out more than he ought, I wonder, now he’s a little in liquor?”

While young Thorpe was pondering thus, Mr.

Marksman was still industriously scouring the barrel of the rifle. After the silence in the room had lasted some minutes, he suddenly threw away his bit of sand-paper, and spoke again.

"Zack," said he, familiarly smacking the stock of the rifle, while he still looked down steadily on it, "Me and you had some talk once about going away to the wild country over the waters together. I'm ready to sail when you are, if ——" He had glanced up at young Thorpe with his vacant blood-shot eyes, as he spoke the last words. But he checked himself almost at the same moment, and looked away again quickly at the gun.

"If what?" asked Zack.

"I want to find out Arthur Carr first," answered Mat evasively, and with very unusual lowness of tone. "Only let me do that, and I shall be game to tramp it at an hour's notice. He may be dead and buried for anything I know——"

"Then what's the use of looking for him?" interposed Zack.

"The use is, I've got it into my head he's alive, and that I shall find him," returned Mat.

"Well?" said young Thorpe eagerly.

Mat became silent again. His head drooped

slowly forward, and his body followed it till he rested his elbows on the gun. Sitting in this strange crouched-up position, he abstractedly began to amuse himself by snapping the lock of the rifle. Zack, suspecting that the brandy he had swallowed was beginning to stupefy him, determined with characteristic recklessness, to rouse him into talking at any hazard.

"What the devil is all this mystery about?" he cried boldly. "I'll be hanged if I can make out what you've been up to all night! Ever since you pulled out that feather-fan and tobacco-pouch at Blyth's——"

"Well! what of them?" interrupted Mat, looking up instantly with a fierce, suspicious stare.

"Nothing particular," pursued Zack, undauntedly, "except that it's odd you never brought them out before; and odder still that you should tell Blyth, and never say a word here to me, about getting them for a woman, who——"

"What of *her*?" broke out Mat, rising to his feet with flushed face and threatening eyes, and making the room ring again as he grounded his rifle on the floor.

"Nothing but what a friend ought to say," replied

Zack, feeling that, in Mr. Marksman's present condition, he had ventured a little too far. "I'm sorry, for your sake, that she never lived to have the presents you meant for her. There's no offence, I hope, in saying that much, or in asking (after what you yourself told Blyth) whether her death happened lately, or ——"

"It happened afore ever you was born." He gave this answer, which amazed Zack more than anything he had heard yet, in a curiously smothered, abstracted tone, as if he were talking to himself; laying aside the rifle suddenly as he spoke, sitting down by the table again, and resting his head on his hand. Young Thorpe took a chair near him, but wisely refrained from saying anything just at that moment. Silence seemed to favour the change that was taking place for the better in Mat's temper. He looked up, after awhile, and regarded Zack with a rough wistfulness and anxiety working in his swarthy face. "I like you, Zack," he said, laying one hand on the lad's arm and mechanically stroking down the cloth of his sleeve. "I like you. Don't let us two part company. Let's always pull together brotherly and pleasant as we can." He paused. His hand tightened round young Thorpe's arm;

and the hot, dry, tearless look in his eyes began to soften as he added, "I take it kind in you, Zack, saying you were sorry for her just now. She died afore ever you was born." His hand relaxed its grasp; and when he had repeated those last words, he turned a little away, and said no more.

Astonishment and curiosity impelled young Thorpe to hazard another question.

"Was she a sweetheart of yours?" he asked, unconsciously sinking his voice to a whisper, "or a relation, or——"

"Kin to me. Kin to me," said Mat quickly, yet not impatiently; reaching out his hand again to Zack's arm, but without looking up.

"Was she your mother?"

"No."

"Sister?"

"Yes."

For a minute or two Zack was silent after this answer. As soon as he began to speak again, his companion shook his arm—a little impatiently, this time—and stopped him.

"Drop it," said Mat peremptorily. "Don't let's talk no more, my head——"

"Anything wrong with your head?" asked Zack.

Mat rose to his feet again. A change began to appear in his face. The flush that had tinged it from the first, deepened palpably, and spread up to the very rim of his black skull-cap. A confusion and dimness seemed to be stealing over his eyes, a thickness and heaviness to be impeding his articulation when he spoke again.

"I've overdone it with the brandy," he said, "my head's getting hot under the place where they scalped me. Give me holt of my hat, and show me a light, Zack. I can't stop in doors no longer. Don't talk ! Let me out of the house at once."

Young Thorpe took up the candle directly ; and leading the way down-stairs, let him out into the street by the private door, not venturing to irritate him by saying anything, but waiting on the doorstep, and watching him with great curiosity as he started for his walk. He was just getting out of sight, when Zack heard him stop, and strike his stick on the pavement. In less than a minute he had turned, and was back again at the door of the tobacconist's shop.

"Zack," he whispered, "you ask about among your friends, if any of 'em ever knowed a man with that name I told you of."

"Do you mean the '*Arthur Carr*' you were talking about just now?" inquired young Thorpe.

"Yes; *Arthur Carr*," said Mat, very earnestly. Then, turning away before Zack could ask him any other questions, he disappeared rapidly this time in the darkness of the street.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. MARKSMAN'S SECOND COUNTRY TRIP.

MR. BLYTH was astir betimes on the morning after Mat and young Thorpe had visited him in the studio. Manfully determined not to give way an inch to his own continued reluctance to leave home, he packed up his brushes and colours, took an affectionate leave of his wife and Madonna, and started on his portrait-painting tour by the early train which he had originally settled to travel by.

His present prospects of professional employment took him to the West of England, and to a neighbourhood renowned for the hospitality of its inhabitants and the beauty of its scenery. Though he had thus every chance of spending his time, during his absence, agreeably as well as profitably, his inexplicable sense of uneasiness at being away from home, remained with him even on the railway; defying all

the exhilarating influences of rapid motion and change of scene, and oppressing him just as inveterately as it had oppressed him the night before. Bad, however, as his spirits now were, they would have been much worse, if he had known of two remarkable domestic events, which it had been the policy of his household to keep strictly concealed from him on the day of his departure.

When Mr. Blyth's cook descended the first thing in the morning to air the studio in the usual way by opening the garden door, she was not a little amazed and alarmed to find that, although it was closed, it was neither bolted nor locked. She communicated this circumstance (reproachfully, of course) to the house-maid, who answered (indignantly, as was only natural) by reiterating her assertion of the past night, that she had secured the door properly at six o'clock in the evening. Polly, appealing to contradictory visible fact, rejoined that the thing was impossible. Patty, holding fast to affirmatory personal knowledge, retorted that the thing had been done. Upon this, the two had a violent quarrel—followed by a sulky silence—succeeded by an affectionate reconciliation—terminated by a politic resolution to say nothing more about the

matter, and especially to abstain from breathing a word in connection with it to the ruling authorities above stairs. Thus it happened that neither Valentine nor his wife knew anything of the suspicious appearance presented that morning by the garden door.

But, though Mrs. Blyth was ignorant on this point, she was well enough informed on another of equal, if not greater, domestic importance. While her husband was down-stairs taking his early breakfast, Madonna came into her room; and followed up the usual morning greeting between the painter's wife and herself, by communicating confidentially all the particulars of the terrible fright that she had suffered, while looking for her bodkin-case in the studio. How her candle could possibly have gone out, as it did in an instant, she could not say. She was quite sure that nobody was in the room when she entered it; and quite sure that she felt no draught of wind in any direction—in short, she knew nothing of her own experience, but that her candle suddenly went out; that she remained for a little time, half dead with fright, in the darkness; and that she then managed to grope her way back to her bedroom, in which a night-light was always burning.

Mrs. Blyth followed the progress of this strange story on Madonna's fingers with great interest to the end; and then, after suggesting that the candle might have gone out through some defect in the make of it, or might really have been extinguished by a puff of air which the girl was too much occupied in looking for her bodkin-case to attend to, earnestly charged her not to say a word on the subject of her adventure to Valentine, when she went to help him in packing up his painting materials. "He is nervous and uncomfortable enough already, poor fellow, at the idea of leaving home," thought Mrs. Blyth; "and if he heard the story about the candle going out, it would only make him more uneasy still." To explain this consideration to Madonna was to ensure her discretion. She accordingly kept her adventure in the studio so profound a secret from Mr. Blyth, that he no more suspected what had happened to her after he was in bed, than he suspected what had happened to the Hair Bracelet, when he hastily assured himself that he was leaving his bureau properly locked, by trying the lid of it the last thing before going away.

Such were the circumstances under which Valentine left home. He was not, however, the only

traveller of the reader's acquaintance, whose departure from London took place on the morning after the mysterious extinguishing of Madonna's light in the painting-room. By a whimsical coincidence, it so happened that, at the very same hour when Mr. Blyth was journeying westward to paint portraits, Mr. Matthew Marksman (now, perhaps, also recognisable as Mr. Matthew Grice) was journeying northward, to pay a second visit to Dibbledean.

Not a visit of pleasure by any means, but a visit of business—dangerous personal business which could not be trusted to clerks and deputies—doubtful, underhand business, of the sort that cannot safely be written in day-books and ledgers—business, which in every particular, Mat had especially intended to keep strictly secret from Zack ; but some inkling of which he had nevertheless weakly allowed to escape him, during his past night's conversation with the lad in Kirk Street.

When young Thorpe and he met on the morning after that conversation, he was sufficiently aware of the fact that his overdose of brandy had set him talking in a very unguarded manner ; and desired Zack, as bluntly as usual, to repeat to him all that he had let out while the liquor was in his head. After

this request had been complied with, he volunteered no additional confidences. He simply said that what had slipped from his tongue was no more than the truth; but that he could add nothing to it, and explain nothing about it, until he had first discovered whether "Arthur Carr" were alive or dead. On being asked how, and when, he intended to discover this, he answered that he was going into the country to make the attempt that very morning; and that, if he succeeded, he would, on his return, tell his fellow-lodger unreservedly all that the latter might wish to know. Favoured with this conditional promise, Zack was left alone in Kirk Street, to quiet his curiosity as well as he could, with the reflection that he should hear something more about his friend's secrets, when Mat returned from his trip to the country.

In order to collect a little more information on the subject of these secrets than was at present possessed by Zack, it will be necessary to return for a moment to the lodgings in Kirk Street, at that particular period of the night when Mr. Marksman was sitting alone in the front room and was holding the Hair Bracelet crumpled up tight in one of his hands.

His first glance at the letters engraved on the clasp not only showed him to whom the Bracelet had once belonged, but set at rest in his mind all further doubt as to the identity of the young woman, whose face had so startled and impressed him in Mr. Blyth's studio. He was neither logical enough nor legal enough in his mode of reasoning, to see, that, although he had found his sister's bracelet in Valentine's bureau, it did not actually follow as a matter of proof—though it might as a matter of suspicion—that he had also found his sister's child in Valentine's house. No such objection as this occurred to him. He was now perfectly satisfied that Madonna was what he had suspected her to be from the first—Mary's child.

But to the next questions that he asked himself, concerning the girl's father, the answers were not so easy to be found:—Who was Arthur Carr? Where was he? Was he still alive?

These momentous enquiries had first started in his mind when he had talked with Johanna Grice, after hearing of his sister's death at Dibbledean; and had read that one passage in the old woman's narrative, referring to Carr, which had accidentally caught his eye in the cattle-shed. His thoughts had, however,

been prematurely turned aside from pursuing the direction then given to them, by his meeting soon afterwards with Madonna, and by the train of events and projects which had followed that meeting. Now, when his mind was once more at leisure to resume the consideration of the questions referred to, they recurred to him with redoubled force :—Who was Arthur Carr ? Where was he ? Was he still alive ?

His first hasty suspicion that Valentine might have assumed the name of Arthur Carr, and might therefore be the man himself, was set at rest immediately by another look at the Bracelet. He knew that the lightest in colour, of the two kinds of hair of which it was made, was Carr's hair, because it exactly resembled the surplus lock sent back by the jeweller, and enclosed in Jane Holdsworth's letter. He made the comparison and discovered the resemblance at a glance. The evidence of his own eyesight, which was enough for this, was also enough to satisfy him immediately that Arthur Carr's hair was, in colour, as nearly as possible the exact opposite of Mr. Blyth's hair.

Still, though the painter was assuredly not the father, might he not know who the father was, or had been ? How could he otherwise have got

possession of Mary Grice's bracelet and Mary Grice's child?

These two questions suggested a third in Mat's mind. Should he discover himself at once to Mr. Blyth; and compel him, by fair means or foul, to solve all doubts, and disclose what he knew?

No: not at once. That would be playing, at the outset, a desperate and dangerous move in the game, which had best be reserved to the last. Besides, it was useless to think of questioning Mr. Blyth just now—except by the uncertain and indiscreet process of following him into the country—for he had settled to take his departure from London, early the next morning.

But it was now impossible to rest, after what had been already discovered, without beginning, in one direction or another, the attempt to find out Arthur Carr. Mat's purpose of doing this sprang from the strongest of all resolutions—a vindictive resolution. That dangerous part of the man's nature which his life among the savages and his wanderings in the wild places of the earth had been stealthily nurturing for many a long year past, was beginning to assert itself, now that he had succeeded in penetrating the mystery of Madonna's parentage by

the mother's side. Placed in his position, the tender thought of their sister's child would, at this particular crisis, have been uppermost in many men's hearts. The one deadly thought of the villain who had been Mary's ruin was uppermost in Mat's.

He pondered but a little while on the course that he should pursue, before the idea of returning to Dibbledean, and compelling Johanna Grice to tell more than she had told at their last interview, occurred to him. He disbelieved the passage in her narrative which stated that she had seen and heard nothing of Arthur Carr in all the years that had elapsed since the flight and death of her niece : he had his own conviction, or rather his own presentiment (which he had mentioned to Zack), that the man was still alive somewhere ; and he felt confident that he had it in his power, as a last resource, to awe the old woman into confessing everything that she knew. To Dibbledean, therefore, in the first instance, he resolved to go.

If he failed there in finding any clue to the object of his inquiry, he determined to repair next to Rubbleford, and to address himself boldly to Mrs. Peckover. He remembered that, when Zack had first mentioned her extraordinary behaviour about

the Hair Bracelet in Mr. Blyth's hall, he had prefaced his words by saying, that she knew apparently as much of Madonna's history as the painter did himself; and kept that knowledge just as close and secret. This woman, therefore, doubtless possessed information which she might be either entrapped or forced into communicating. There would be no difficulty about finding out where she lived; for, on the evening when he had mimicked her, young Thorpe had said that she kept a dairy and muffin-shop at Rubbleford. To that town, then, he proposed to journey, in the event of failing in his purpose at Dibbledean.

And if, by any evil chance, he should end in ascertaining no more from Mrs. Peckover than from Johanna Grice, what course should he take next? There would be nothing to be done then, but to return to London—to try the last great hazard—to discover himself to Mr. Blyth, come what might, with the Hair Bracelet to vouch for him in his hand.

These were his thoughts, as he sat alone in the lodging in Kirk Street. At night, they had ended in the fatal consolation of the brandy bottle—in the desperate and solitary excess, which had so

cheated him of his self-controul, that the lurking taint which his life among the savages had left in his disposition, and the deadly rancour which his recent discovery of his sister's fate had stored up in his heart, escaped from concealment, and betrayed themselves in that half-drunken, half-sober occupation of scouring the rifle-barrel, which it had so greatly amazed Zack to witness, and which the lad had so suddenly and strangely suspended by his few chance words of sympathizing reference to Mary's death.

But, in the morning, Mat's head was clear, and his dangerous instincts were held once more under cunning controul. In the morning, therefore, he declined explaining himself to young Thorpe, and started quietly for the country by the first train.

On being set down at the Dibbledean Station, Mr. Marksman lingered a little and looked about him, just as he had lingered and looked, on the occasion of his first visit. He subsequently took the same road to the town, which he had then taken; and, on gaining the church, stopped as he had formerly stopped, at the churchyard-gate.

This time, however, he seemed to have no

intention of passing the entrance—no intention, indeed, of doing anything, unless standing vacantly by the gate, and mechanically swinging it backwards and forwards with both his hands, can be considered in the light of an occupation. As for the churchyard, he hardly looked at it now. There were two or three people, at a little distance, walking about among the graves, who it might have been thought would have attracted his attention ; but he never took the smallest notice of them. He was evidently meditating about something, for he soon began to talk to himself—being, like most men who have passed much of their time in solitude, unconsciously in the habit of thinking aloud.

“I wonder how many year ago it is, since she and me used to swing back’ards and for’ards on this,” he said, still pushing the gate slowly to and fro. “The hinges used to creak then. They go smooth enough now. Oiled, I suppose.” As he said this, he moved his hands from the bar on which they rested, and turned away to go on to the town ; but stopped, and walking back to the gate, looked attentively at its hinges—“Ah,” he said, “not oiled. New.”

“New,” he repeated, walking slowly towards the

High Street—"new since my time, like everything else here. I wish I'd never come back—I wish to God I'd never come back!"

On getting into the town, he stopped at the same place where he had halted on his first visit to Dibbledean, to look up again, as he had looked then, at the hosier's shop which had once belonged to Joshua Grice. Here, those visible and tangible signs and tokens, which he required to stimulate his sluggish memory, were not very easy to recognise. Though the general form of his father's old house was still preserved, the re-painting and renovating of the whole front had somewhat altered it, in its individual parts, to his eyes. He looked up and down at the gables, and all along from window to window; and shook his head discontentedly. "New again here," he said. "I can't make out for certain which winder it was Mary and me broke between us, when I come away from school, the year afore I went to sea. Whether it was Mary that broke the winder, and me that took the blame," he continued, slowly pursuing his way—"or whether it was her that took the blame, and me that broke the winder, I can't rightly call to mind. And no great wonder neither, if I've forgot such a thing

as that, when I can't even fix it for certain, yet, whether she used to wear her Hair Bracelet or not, while I was at home."

Communing with himself in this way, he reached the turning that led to Johanna Grice's cottage.

His thoughts had thus far been straying away idly and uninterruptedly to the past. They were now recalled abruptly to present emergencies by certain unexpected appearances which met his eye, the moment he looked down the lane along which he was walking.

He remembered this place as having struck him by its silence and its loneliness, on the occasion of his first visit to Dibbledean. He now observed with some surprise that it was astir with human beings, and noisy with the clamour of gossiping tongues. All the inhabitants of the cottages on either side of the road were out in their front gardens. All the townspeople who ought to have been walking about the principal streets, seemed to be incomprehensibly congregated in this one narrow little lane. What were they assembled here to do? What subject was it that men and women—and even children as well—were all eagerly talking about?

Without waiting to hear, without questioning anybody, without appearing to notice that he was stared at (as indeed all strangers are in rural England), as if he were walking about among a breeched and petticoated people in the character of a savage with nothing but war paint on him, Mat steadily and rapidly pursued his way down the lane to Johanna Grice's cottage. "Time enough," thought he, "to find out what all this means, when I've got quietly into the house I'm bound for."

As he approached the cottage, he saw, standing at the gate, what looked to his eyes, like two coaches — one, very strange in form: both very remarkable in colour. All about the coaches stood solemn-looking gentlemen; and all about the solemn-looking gentlemen, circled inquisitively and excitably, the whole vagabond boy-and-girl population of Dibledean.

Amazed, and even bewildered (though he hardly knew why) by what he saw, Mat hastened on to the cottage. Just as he arrived at the garden paling, the door opened, and from the inside of the dwelling there protruded slowly into the open air a coffin carried on four men's shoulders, and covered with a magnificent black velvet pall.

Mat stopped the moment he saw the coffin, and struck his hand violently on the paling by his side. "Dead?" he exclaimed under his breath.

"A friend of the late Miss Grice's?" asked a gently inquisitive voice near him.

He did not hear. All his attention was fixed on the coffin, as it was borne slowly over the garden path. Behind it walked two gentlemen, mournfully arrayed in black cloaks and hat-bands. They carried white handkerchiefs in their hands, and used them to wipe—not their eyes—but their lips, on which the balmy dews of recent wine-drinking glistened gently.

"Dix and Nawby—the medical attendant of the deceased, and the solicitor who is her sole executor," said the voice near Mat, in tones which had ceased to be gently inquisitive, and had become complacently explanatory instead. "That's Millbury, the undertaker, and the other is Gutteridge of the White Hart Inn, his brother-in-law, who supplies the refreshments, which in my opinion makes a regular job of it," continued the voice, as two red-faced gentlemen followed the doctor and the lawyer. "Something like a funeral, this! Not a halfpenny less than forty pound, *I* should say, when it's all

paid for. . Beautiful, ain't it ? " concluded the voice, becoming gently inquisitive again.

Still, Mat kept his eyes fixed on the funeral proceedings in front ; and took not the smallest notice of the pertinacious speaker behind him.

The coffin was placed in the hearse. Dr. Dix and Mr. Nawby entered the mourning coach provided for them. The smug human vultures who prey commercially on the civilised dead, arranged themselves, with black wands, in solemn Undertakers' order of procession on either side of the funeral vehicles. Those clumsy pomps of feathers and velvet, those grim vanities of strutting horses and marching mutes, which are still permitted among us to desecrate with grotesquely-shocking fiction the solemn fact of death, fluttered out in their blackest state grandeur and showed their most woeful state paces, as the procession started magnificently with its meagre offering of one dead body more to the bare and awful grave.

When Mary Grice died, a fugitive and an outcast, the clown's wife and the Irish girl who rode in the circus, wept for her, stranger though she was, as they followed her coffin to the poor corner of the churchyard. When Johanna Grice died in the place

of her birth, among the townspeople with whom her whole existence had been passed, every eye was tearless that looked on her funeral-procession—the two strangers who made part of it, gossiped pleasantly as they rode after the hearse about the news of the morning—and the sole surviving member of her family, whom chance had brought to her door on her burial-day, stood aloof from the hired mourners, and moved not a step to follow her to the grave.

No: not a step. The hearse rolled on slowly towards the churchyard, and the sight-seers in the lane followed it; but Matthew Grice stood by the garden paling, at the place where he had halted from the first. What was her death to him? Nothing but the loss of his first chance of tracing Arthur Carr. Tearlessly and pitilessly she had left it to strangers to bury her brother's daughter; and now, tearlessly and pitilessly, there stood her brother's son, leaving it to strangers to bury *her*.

"Don't you mean to follow to the churchyard, and see the last of it?" inquired the same inquisitive voice, which had twice already endeavoured to attract Mat's attention.

He turned round this time to look at the speaker, and confronted a wizen, flaxen-haired, sharp-faced

man, dressed in a jaunty shooting-jacket, carrying a riding-cane in his hand, and having a thorough-bred black-and-tan terrier in attendance at his heels.

"Excuse me asking the question," said the wizen man; "but I noticed you as you came up to the gate here, and observed how dumbfounded you were when you saw the coffin come out. 'A friend of the deceased,' I thought to myself directly——"

"Well," interrupted Mat, gruffly, "suppose I am; what then?"

"Will you oblige me by putting this in your pocket?" asked the wizen man, giving Mat a card. "My name's Tatt, and I've recently started in practice here as a solicitor. I don't want to ask any improper questions, but, being a friend of the deceased, you may perhaps have some claim on the estate; in which case, I should feel proud to take care of your interests. It isn't strictly professional, I know, to be touting for the chance of a client in this way; but I'm obliged to do it in self-defence. Dix, Nawby, Millbury, and Gutteridge, all play into one another's hands, and want to monopolise among 'em the whole Doctoring, Lawyering, Undertaking, and Licensed Victualling business of Dibbledean. I've made up my mind to break down Nawby's monopoly,

and keep as much business out of his office as I can. That's why I take time by the forelock, and give you my card." Here Mr. Tatt left off explaining, and began to play with his terrier.

Mat looked up thoughtfully at Johanna Grice's cottage. Might she not, in all probability, have left some important letters behind her? And, if he mentioned who he was, could not the wiser man by his side help him to get at them?

"A good deal of mystery about the late Miss Grice," resumed Mr. Tatt, still playing with the terrier. "Nobody but Dix and Nawby can tell exactly when she died, or how she's left her money. Queer family altogether. (Rats, Pincher! where are the rats?) There's a son of old Grice's, who has never, they say, been properly accounted for. (Hie, boy! there's a cat! hie after her, Pincher!) If he was only to turn up now, I believe, between ourselves, it would put the damndest spoke in Nawby's wheel——"

"I may have a question or two to ask you one of these days," interposed Mat, turning away from the garden paling at last. While his new acquaintance had been speaking, he had been making up his mind that he should best serve his purpose of tracing

Arthur Carr, by endeavouring forthwith to get all the information that Mrs. Peckover might be able to afford him. In the event of this resource proving useless, there would be plenty of time to return to Dibbledean, discover himself to Mr. Tatt, and ascertain whether the law would not give to Joshua Grice's son the right of examining Johanna Grice's papers.

"Come to my office," cried Mr. Tatt, enthusiastically. "I can give you a prime bit of Stilton, and as good a glass of bitter beer as ever you drank in your life."

Mat declined this hospitable invitation peremptorily, and set forth at once on his return to the station. All Mr. Tatt's efforts to engage him for an "early day," and an "appointed hour," failed. He would only repeat, doggedly, that at some future time he might have a question or two to ask about a matter of law, and that his new acquaintance should then be the man to whom he would apply for information.

They wished each other "good morning" at the entrance of the lane,—Mr. Tatt lounging slowly up the High Street, with his terrier at his heels; and Mat walking rapidly in the contrary direction, on his way back to the railway station.

As he passed the churchyard, the funeral procession had just arrived at its destination, and the bearers were carrying the coffin from the hearse to the church-door. He stopped a little by the roadside, to see it go in. "She was no good to anybody about her, all her lifetime," he thought bitterly, as the last heavy fold of the velvet pall was lost to view in the darkness of the church entrance. "But if she'd only lived a day or two longer, she might have been of some good to *me*. There's more of what I wanted to know nailed down along with her in that coffin, than ever I'm likely to find out anywhere else. It's a long hunt of mine, this is—a long hunt on a dull scent; and *her* death has made it duller." With this farewell thought, he turned from the church.

As he pursued his way back to the railroad, he took Jane Holdsworth's letter out of his pocket, and looked at the hair inclosed in it. It was the fourth or fifth time he had done this during the few hours that had passed since he had possessed himself of Mary's Bracelet. From that period there had grown within him a vague conviction, that the possession of Carr's hair might in some way lead to the discovery of Carr himself. He knew perfectly well that there

was not the slightest present or practical use in examining this hair, and yet, there was something that seemed to strengthen him afresh in his purpose, to encourage him anew after his unexpected check at Dibbledean, merely in the act of looking at it. "If I can't track him no other way," he muttered, replacing the hair in his pocket, "I've got the notion into my head, somehow, that I shall track him by this."

Mat found it no very easy business to reach Rubbleford. He had to go back a little way on the Dibbledean line—then to diverge by a branch line—and then to get upon another main line, and travel along it some distance before he reached his destination. It was dark by the time he reached Rubbleford. However, by inquiring of one or two people, he easily found the dairy and muffin-shop when he was once in the town; and saw to his great delight that it was not shut up for the night. He looked in at the window, under a plaster-cast of a cow, and observed by the light of one tallow-candle burning inside, a chubby, buxom girl sitting at the counter, and either drawing or writing something on a slate. Entering the shop, after a moment or two of hesitation, he asked if he could see Mrs. Peckover.

"Mother went away, sir, three days ago, to nurse uncle Bob at Bangbury," answered the girl.

(Here was a second check—a second obstacle to defer the tracing of Arthur Carr! It seemed like a fatality!)

"When do you expect her back?" asked Mat.

"Not for a week or ten days, sir," answered the girl. "Mother said she wouldn't have gone, but for uncle Bob being her only brother, and not having wife or child to look after him at Bangbury."

(*Bangbury!*—Where had he heard that name before?)

"Father's up at the rectory, sir," continued the girl, observing that the stranger looked both disappointed and puzzled. "If it's dairy business you come upon, I can attend to it; but if it's anything about accounts to settle, mother said they were to be sent on to her."

"Maybe I shall have a letter to send your mother," said Mat, after a moment's consideration. "Can you write me down on a bit of paper where she is?"

"Oh, yes, sir." And the girl very civilly and readily wrote in her best round-hand, on a slip of bill-paper, this address:—"Martha Peckover, at Rob: Randle, 2 Dawson's Buildings, Bangbury."

Mat absently took the slip of paper from her, and put it into his pocket; then thanked the girl, and went out. While he was inside the shop he had been trying in vain to call to mind where he had heard the name of Bangbury before: the moment he was in the street the lost remembrance came back to him. Surely, Bangbury was the place where Johanna Grice had told him that Mary was buried!

After walking a few paces, he came to a large linen-draper's shop, with plenty of light in the window. Stopping here, he hastily drew from his pocket the manuscript containing the old woman's "Justification" of her conduct; for he wished to be certain about the accuracy of his recollection, and he had an idea that the part of the Narrative which mentioned Mary's death would help to decide him in his present doubt.

Yes! on turning to the last page, there it was written in so many words: "I sent, by a person I could depend on, money enough to bury her decently in Bangbury churchyard."

"I'll go there to-night," said Mat to himself, thrusting the letter into his pocket, and taking the way back to the railway-station immediately.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARY'S GRAVE.

MATTHEW GRICE was an energetic and a resolute traveller; but neither energy nor resolution are powerful enough to alter the laws of inexorable Time-Tables to suit the special purposes of individual passengers. Although Mat left Rubbleford in less than an hour after he had arrived there, he only succeeded in getting half-way to Bangbury before he had to stop for the night, and wait at an intermediate station for the first morning train on what was termed the Trunk Line. By this main railroad he reached his destination early in the forenoon, and went at once to Dawson's Buildings.

"Mrs. Peckover has just stepped out, sir—Mr. Randle being a little better this morning—for a mouthful of fresh air. She'll be in again in half-an-hour," said the maid-of-all-work who opened Mr. Randle's door.

Mat began to suspect that something more than mere accident was concerned in keeping Mrs. Peck-over and himself asunder. "I'll come again in half-an-hour," said he—then added, just as the servant was about to shut the door:—"Which is my way to the church?"

Bangbury church was close at hand, and the directions he received for finding it were easy to follow. But when he entered the churchyard, and looked about him anxiously to see where he should begin searching for his sister's grave, his head grew confused, and his heart began to fail him. Bangbury was a large town, and rows and rows of tombstones seemed to fill the churchyard bewilderingly in every visible direction.

At a little distance a man was at work opening a grave, and to him Mat applied for help; describing his sister as a stranger who had been buried somewhere in the churchyard better than twenty years ago. The man was both stupid and surly, and would give no advice except that it was useless to look near where he was digging, for they were all respectable townspeople buried about there.

Mat walked round to the other side of the church. Here the graves were thicker than ever; for here the

poor were buried. He went on slowly through them, with his eyes fixed on the ground, towards some trees which marked the limits of the churchyard; looking out for a place to begin his search in, where the graves might be comparatively few, and where his head might not get confused at the outset. Such a place he found at last, in a damp corner under the trees. About this spot the thin grass languished; the mud distilled into tiny water-pools; and the brambles, briars, and dead leaves lay thickly and foully between a few ragged turf mounds.—Could they have laid her here? Could this be the last refuge to which Mary ran after she fled from home?

A few of the mounds had stained, mouldering tomb-stones at their heads. He looked at these first; and finding only strange names on them, turned next to the mounds marked out by cross-boards of wood. At one of the graves the cross-board had been torn, or had rotted away, from its upright supports, and lay on the ground weather-stained and split, but still faintly showing that it had once had a few letters cut in it. He examined this board to begin with, and was trying to make out what the letters were, when the sound of some one approaching disturbed him. He looked up, and saw a woman

walking slowly towards the very place where he was standing.

It was Mrs. Peckover herself! She had taken a prescription for her sick brother to the chemist's—had bought him one or two little things he wanted, in the High Street—and had now, before resuming her place at his bedside, stolen a few minutes to go and look at the grave of Madonna's mother. It was many, many years since Mrs. Peckover had last paid a visit to Bangbury churchyard.

She stopped and hesitated when she first caught sight of Mat; but, after a moment or two, not being a woman easily baulked in anything when she had once undertaken to do it, continued to advance, and never paused for the second time until she had come close to the grave by which Mat stood, and was looking him steadily in the face, exactly across it.

He was the first to speak. "Do you know whose grave this is?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," answered Mrs. Peckover, glancing indignantly at the broken board and the mud and brambles all about it. "Yes, sir, I *do* know; and, what's more, I know that it's a disgrace to the parish. Money has been paid twice over to keep it decent; and look what a state it's left in."

"I asked you whose grave it was?" repeated Mat, impatiently.

"A poor, unfortunate, forsaken creature's, who's gone to Heaven if ever an afflicted, repenting woman went there yet!" answered Mrs. Peckover, warmly.

"Forsaken? Afflicted? A woman, too?" Mat repeated to himself, thoughtfully.

"Yes, forsaken and afflicted," cried Mrs. Peckover, overhearing him. "Don't you say no ill of her, whoever you are. She shan't be spoken unkindly of in my hearing, poor soul!"

Mat looked up suddenly and eagerly. "What's your name?" he inquired.

"My name's Peckover, and I'm not ashamed of it," was the prompt reply. "And, now, if I may make so bold, what's yours?"

Mat took from his pocket the Hair Bracelet, and, fixing his eyes intently on her face, held it up, across the grave, for her to look at. "Do you know this?" he said.


Mrs. Peckover stooped forward, and closely inspected the Bracelet for a minute or two. "Lord save us!" she exclaimed, recognising it, and confronting him with cheeks that had suddenly become colourless, and eyes that stared in terror and

astonishment. "Lord save us! how did you come by that? And who for mercy's sake are you?"

"My name's Matthew Grice," he answered quickly and sternly. "This Bracelet belonged to my sister, Mary Grice. She run away from home, and died, and was buried in Bangbury churchyard. If you know her grave, tell me in plain words—is it here?"

Breathless as she was with astonishment, Mrs. Peckover managed to stammer a faint answer in the affirmative, and to add that the initials, "M. G.," would be found somewhere on the broken board lying at their feet. She then tried to ask a question or two in her turn; but the words died away in faint exclamations of surprise. "To think of me and you meeting together!" was all she could say;—"her own brother, too! Oh, to think of that!—only to think of that!"

Mat looked down at the mud, the brambles, and the rotting grass that lay over what had once been a living and loving human creature. The dangerous brightness glittered in his eyes, the cold change spread fast over his cheeks, and the scars of the arrow-wounds began to burn redly and more redly, as he whispered to himself—"I'll be even yet, Mary, with the man who laid you here!"



"Does Mr. Blyth know who you are, sir?" asked Mrs. Peckover, hesitating and trembling as she put this question. "Did he give you the Bracelet? Did you and him——"

She stopped. Mat was not listening to her. His eyes were fastened on the grave: he was still talking to himself in quick whispering tones.

"Her Bracelet was hid from me in another man's chest," he said—"I've found her Bracelet. Her child was hid from me in another man's house—I've found her child. Her grave was hid from me in a strange churchyard—I've found her grave. The man who laid her in it is hid from me still—I shall find *him*!"

"Please do listen to me, sir, for one moment," pleaded Mrs. Peckover, more nervously than before. "Does Mr. Blyth know about you? And little Mary—oh, sir, whatever you do, pray, pray don't take her away from where she is now! You can't mean to do that, sir, though you are her own mother's brother? You can't, surely?"

He looked up at her so quickly, with such a fierce, steady, serpent-glitter in his light-grey eyes, that she recoiled a step or two; still pleading, however, with desperate perseverance for an answer to her last question.

"Only tell me, sir, that you don't mean to take little Mary away, and I won't ask you to say so much as another word! Mr. Blyth was always afraid somebody would turn up; and I always said, 'No, they wouldn't;' and here — (oh Lord! oh Lord!)—here it's happened at last!—But you'll leave her with Mr. and Mrs. Blyth, won't you, sir? For your sister's sake, you'll leave her with the poor bed-ridden lady that's been like a mother to her for so many years past?—for your dear, lost sister's sake, that I was with when she died——"

"Tell me about her!" He said those few words with surprising gentleness, as Mrs. Peckover thought, for such a rough-looking man.

"Yes, yes, all you want to know," she answered. "But I can't stop here. There's my brother—I've got such a turn with seeing you, it's almost put him out of my head—there's my brother, that I must go back to, and see if he's asleep still. You just please to come along with me, and wait in the parlour—it's close by—while I step upstairs; and then——" (Here she stopped in great confusion. It seemed like running some desperate risk to ask this strange, stern-featured relation of Mary Grice's into her brother's house.) "And yet," thought Mrs. Peckover,

"if I can only soften his heart by telling him about his poor unfortunate sister, it may make him all the readier to leave little Mary——"

At this point her perplexities were cut short by Matthew himself, who said, shortly, that he had been to Dawson's Buildings already to look after her. On hearing this, she hesitated no longer. It was too late to question the propriety or impropriety of admitting him now.

"Come away, then," she said; "don't let's wait no longer. And don't fret about the infamous state they've left things in here," she added, thinking to propitiate him, as she saw his eyes turn once more at parting, on the broken board and the brambles around the grave. "I know where to go, and who to speak to——"


"Go nowhere, and speak to nobody," he broke in sternly, to her great astonishment. "All what's got to be done to it, I mean to do myself."

"You!"

"Yes, me. It was little enough I ever did for her while she was alive; and it's little enough now, only to make things look decent about the place where she's buried. But I mean to do that much for her; and no other man shall stir a finger to help me."

Roughly as it was spoken, this speech made Mrs. Peckover feel easier about Madonna's prospects. The hard-featured man was, after all, not so hard-hearted as she had thought him at first. She even ventured now to begin questioning him again, as they walked together towards Dawson's Buildings.

He varied very much in his manner of receiving her inquiries—replying to some promptly enough, and gruffly refusing, in the plainest terms, to give a word of answer to others. He was quite willing, for example, to admit that he had procured her temporary address at Bangbury from her daughter at Rubbleford; but he flatly declined to inform her how he had first found out that she lived at Rubbleford at all. Again, he readily admitted that neither Madonna nor Mr. Blyth knew who he really was; but he refused to say why he had not disclosed himself to them, or when he intended—if he ever intended at all—to inform them that he was the brother of Mary Grice. As to getting him to confess in what manner he had become possessed of the Hair Bracelet, Mrs. Peckover's first question about it, although only answered by a look, was received in such a manner as to show her that any further



efforts on her part in that direction would be perfectly fruitless.

On one side of the door, at Dawson's Buildings, was Mr. Randle's shop; and on the other was Mr. Randle's little dining parlour. In this room Mrs. Peckover left Mat, while she went up stairs to see if her sick brother wanted anything. Finding that he was still quietly sleeping, she only waited to arrange the bed-clothes comfortably about him, and to put a hand-bell easily within his reach in case he should awake, and then went down stairs again immediately.

She found Mat sitting with his elbows on the one little table in the dining-parlour, his head resting on his hands. Upon the table, lying by the side of the Bracelet, was the lock of hair out of Jane Holdsworth's letter, which he had yet once more taken from his pocket to look at. "Why, mercy on me!" cried Mrs. Peckover, glancing at it, "surely it's the same hair that's worked into the Bracelet! Wherever, for goodness sake, did you get that?"

"Never mind where I got it. Do you know whose hair it is? No! you don't? Look a little closer. The man this hair belonged to was the man she

trusted in—and he laid her in the churchyard for her pains.”

“Oh! who was he? who was he?” asked Mrs. Peckover, eagerly.

“Who was he?” repeated Matthew, sternly. “What do you mean by asking me that?”

“I only mean that I never heard a word about the villain—I don’t so much as know his name.”

“You don’t?” He fastened his eyes suspiciously on her as he said those two words.

“No; as true as I stand here I don’t. Why, I didn’t even know that your poor dear sister’s name was Grice till you told me.”

His look of suspicion began to change to a look of amazement as he heard this. He hurriedly gathered up the Bracelet and the lock of hair, and put them into his pocket again. “Let’s hear first how you met with her,” he said. “I’ll have a word or two with you about the other matter afterwards.”

Mrs. Peckover sat down near him, and began to relate the mournful story which she had told to Valentine and Doctor and Mrs. Joyce, now many years ago, in the Rectory dining-room. But on this occasion she was not—as on the last—allowed to go through her narrative uninterruptedly. While she

was uttering the few simple words which told how she had sat down by the road-side and suckled the half-starved infant of the forsaken and dying Mary Grice, Mat suddenly reached out his heavy, trembling hand, and took fast hold of hers. He gripped it with such force that, stout-hearted and hardy as she was, she cried out in alarm and pain, "Oh, don't! you hurt me—you hurt me!"

He dropped her hand directly, and turned his face away from her; his breath quickening painfully, his fingers fastening on the side of his chair as if some great pang of oppression was trying him to the quick. She rose and asked anxiously what ailed him; but, even as the words passed her lips, he mastered himself with that iron resolution of his which few trials could bend, and none break; and motioned to her to sit down again. "Don't mind me," he said; "I'm old and tough-hearted with being battered about in the world, and I can't give myself vent nohow with talking or crying like the rest of you. Never mind; it's all over now. Go on."

She complied, a little nervously at first; but he did not interrupt her again. He listened while she proceeded, looking straight at her; not speaking or moving—except when he winced one or twice, as a

man winces under unexpected pain, while Mary's death-bed words were repeated to him. Having reached this stage of her narrative, Mrs. Peckover added little more; only saying, in conclusion: "I took care of the poor soul's child, as I said I would; and did my best to behave like a mother to her, till she got to be ten year old; then I give her up—because it was for her own good—to Mr. Blyth."

(If he had wanted any confirmation of his belief that Madonna was really and truly the child of Mary Grice, here it was. But his convictions on this point had been settled beforehand, and the words Mrs. Peckover had just spoken produced apparently no effect on him.)

"I dare say you know all about what Mr. Blyth has done for her?" continued the good woman; "and about the fall that took her hearing away? Surely, you don't want me to tell how that happened, do you?"

He did not seem to notice this question. The image of the forsaken girl, sitting alone by the roadside, with her child's natural sustenance dried up within her—travel-worn, friendless, and desperate—was still uppermost in his mind; and when he next spoke, gratitude for the help that had been given to

Mary in her last sore distress was the one predominant emotion, which strove roughly to express itself to Mrs. Peckover in his words.

"Is there any living soul you care about that a trifle of money would do a little good to?" he asked, with such abrupt eagerness that she was quite startled by it.

"Lord bless me!" she exclaimed, "what do you mean? What has that got to do with your poor sister, or Mr. Blyth, or anything ——"

"It's got this to do," burst out Matthew, starting to his feet, as the struggling gratitude within him stirred body and soul both together; "you turned to and helped Mary when she hadn't nobody else in the world to stand by her. She was always father's darling—but father couldn't help her then; and I was away on the wrong side of the sea, and couldn't be no good to her neither. But I'm on the right side, now; and if there's any friends of yours, north, south, east, or west, as would be happier for a trifle of money, here's all mine; catch it, and give it 'em." (He tossed his beaver-skin roll, with the bank-notes in it, into Mrs. Peckover's lap.) "Here's my two hands, that I dursn't take a holt of yours with for fear of hurting you again" (pacing backwards

and forwards in the little room, and tucking up the cuffs of his coat)—“here’s my two hands that can work along with any man’s. Only give ’em something to do for you, that’s all! Give ’em something to make or mend, I don’t care what, so long as you ——”

“Hush! hush!” interposed Mrs. Peckover; “don’t be so dreadful noisy, there’s a good man! or you’ll wake my brother up stairs. And, besides, where’s the use to make such a stir about what I done for your sister? Anybody else would have took as kindly to her as I did, seeing what distress she was in, poor soul! Here,” she continued, handing him back the beaver-skin roll, “here’s your money, and thank you for the offer of it. Put it up safe in your pocket again. We manage to keep our heads above water, thank God! and don’t want to do no better than that. Put it up in your pocket again, and then I’ll make bold to ask you for something else.”

“For what?” inquired Mat, looking her eagerly in the face.

“Just for this: that you’ll promise not to take little Mary away from Mr. Blyth. Do, pray do promise me you won’t?”

"I never thought to take her away," he answered. "Where should *I* take her to? What could a lonesome old vagabond, like me, do for her? If she's happy where she is—let her stop where she is."

"Lord bless you for saying that!" fervently exclaimed Mrs. Peckover, smiling for the first time, and smoothing out her gown over her knees with an air of inexpressible relief. "I'm rid of my grand fright now, and I'm getting to breathe again freely, which I haven't once yet been able to do since I first set eyes on you. Ah! you're rough to look at; but you've got your feelings like the rest of us. Talk away now as much as you like. Ask me about anything you please, and ——"

"What's the good?" he broke in, gloomily. "You don't know what I wanted you to know. I come down here for to find out the man as once owned this"—(he pulled the lock of hair out of his pocket again)—"and you can't help me. I didn't believe it when you first said so, but I do now."

"Well, thank you for saying that much; though you might have put it civiller ——"

"His name was Arthur Carr. Did you never hear tell of anybody with the name of Arthur Carr?"

"No: never—never till this very moment."

"The Painter Man will know," continued Mat, talking more to himself than to Mrs. Peckover. "I must go back, and chance it with the Painter Man, after all."

"Painter Man?" repeated Mrs. Peckover. "Painter? Surely you don't mean Mr. Blyth?"

"Yes, I do."

"Why! what in the name of fortune can you be thinking of? How should Mr. Blyth know more than me? He never set eyes on little Mary till she was ten year old; and he knows nothing about her poor unfortunate mother except what I told him."

These words seemed at first to stupefy Mat: they burst upon him in the shape of a revelation for which he was totally unprepared. It had never once occurred to him to doubt that Valentine was secretly informed of all that he most wished to know. He had looked forward to what the painter might be persuaded—or, in the last resort, forced—to tell him, as the one certainty on which he might finally depend; and here was this fancied security exposed, in a moment, as the wildest delusion that ever man trusted in! What resource was left? To return to Dibbledean, and, by the legal help of Mr. Tatt, to


possess himself of any fragments of evidence which Johanna Grice might have left behind her in writing? This seemed but a broken reed to depend on; and yet nothing else now remained.

"I shall find him! I don't care where he's hid away from me, I shall find him yet," thought Mat, still holding with dogged and desperate obstinacy to his first superstition, in spite of every fresh sign that appeared to confute it.

"But why worrit yourself about finding Arthur Carr at all?" pursued Mrs. Peckover, noticing his perplexed and mortified expression. "The wretch is dead, most likely, by this time ——"

"*I'm* not dead!" retorted Mat, fiercely; "*and you're* not dead; and you and me are as old as him. Don't tell me he's dead again! I say he's alive; and, by G—d, I'll be even with him!"

"Oh, don't talk so, don't! It's shocking to hear you and see you," said Mrs. Peckover, recoiling from the expression of his eye at that moment, just as she had recoiled from it already over Mary's grave. "Suppose he is alive, why should you go taking vengeance into your own hands after all these years? Your poor sister's happy in heaven; and her child's took care of by the kindest people, I do believe, that



ever drew breath in this world. Why should you want to be even with him now? If he hasn't been punished already, I'll answer for it he will be—in the next world, if not in this. Don't talk about it, or think about it any more, that's a good man! Let's be friendly and pleasant together again—like we were just now—for Mary's sake. Tell me where you've been to all these years. How is it you've never turned up before? That's what I want so particularly to know. Come! tell me, do."

She ended by speaking to him in much the same tone which she would have made use of to soothe a fractious child. But her instinct as a woman guided her truly: in venturing on that little reference to "Mary," she had not ventured in vain. It quieted him, and turned aside the current of his thoughts into the better and smoother direction. "Didn't she never talk to you about having a brother as was away aboard ship?" he asked, anxiously.

"No. She wouldn't say a word about any of her friends, and she didn't say a word about you. But how did you come to be so long away?—that's what I want to know," said Mrs. Peckover, pertinaciously repeating her question, partly out of curiosity, partly out of the desire to keep

him from returning to the dangerous subject of Arthur Carr.

"I was always a damned bad 'un, *I was*," said Matthew, meditatively. "There was no keeping of me straight, try it anyhow you like. I bolted from home, I bolted from school, I bolted from aboard ship ——"

"Why? What for?"

"Partly because I was a damned bad 'un, and partly because of a letter I picked up in port, at the Brazils, at the end of a long cruise. Here's the letter—but it's no good showing it to you: the paper's so grimed and tore about you can't read it."

"Who wrote it? Mary?"

"No: father—saying what had happened to Mary, and telling me not to come back home till things was pulled straight again. Here—here's what he said—under the big grease-spot: 'If you can get continued employment anywhere abroad,' he said, 'accept it instead of coming back.' Then he said again—(down here; t'other side of where the paper's tore)—'Better for you, at your age, to be spared the sight of such sorrow as we are now suffering.' Do you see that?"

"Yes, yes, I see. Ah, poor man! he couldn't give no kinder nor better advice; and you ——"

"Deserted from my ship. The devil was in me to be off on the tramp, and father's letter did the rest. I got wild and desperate with the thought of what had happened to Mary, and with knowing they were ashamed to see me back again at home. So the night afore the ship sailed for England I slipped into a shore-boat, and turned my back on salt-junk and the boatswain's mate for the rest of my life."

"You don't mean to say you've done nothing but wander about in foreign parts from that time to this?"

"I do, though! I'd a notion I should be shot for a deserter if I turned up too soon in my own country. That kep' me away for ever so long, to begin with. Then Tramps' Fever got into my head; and there was an end of it."

"Tramps' Fever! Mercy on me! what do you mean?"

"I mean this: when a man turns gipsey on his own account, as I did; and tramps about through Cold and Hot, and Winter and Summer, not caring where he goes or what the h—ll becomes of him; that sort of life ends by getting into his head,

just like liquor does—except that it don't get out again. It got into my head. It's in it now. Tramps' Fever kep' me away in the wild country. Tramps' Fever will take me back there afore long. Tramps' Fever will lay me down, some day, in the lonesome places, with my hand on my rifle and my face to the sky; and I shan't get up again till the crows and vultures come and carry me off piecemeal."

"Lord bless us! how can you talk about yourself in that way?" cried Mrs. Peckover, shuddering at the grim image which Mat's last words suggested. "You're trying to make yourself out worse than you are. Surely, you must have thought of your father and sister, sometimes—didn't you?"

"Think of them? Of course I did! But, mind ye, there come a time when I as good as forgot them altogether. They seemed to get smeared out of my head—like we used to smear old sums off our slates at school."

"More shame for you! Whatever else you forgot, you oughtn't to have forgotten ——"

"Wait a bit. Father's letter told me—I'd show you the place only I know you couldn't read it—that he was a going to look after Mary, and bring her

back home, and forgive her. He'd done that twice for me, when *I* run away; so I didn't doubt but what he'd do it just the same for *her*. She'll pull through her scrape with father just as I used to pull through mine—was what I thought. And so she would, if her own kin hadn't turned against her; if father's own sister hadn't ——” He stopped; the frown gathered on his brow, and the oath burst from his lips, as he thought of Johanna Grice's share in preventing Mary's restoration to her home.

“There! there!” interposed Mrs. Peckover, soothingly. “Talk about something pleasanter. Let's hear how you come back to England.”


“I can't rightly fix it when Mary first begun to drop out of my head like,” Mat continued, abstractedly pursuing his previous train of recollections. “I used to think of her often enough, when I started for my run in the wild country. That was the time, mind ye, when I had clear notions about coming back home. I got her a scarlet pouch and another feather plaything then, knowing she was fond of knick-knacks, and making it out in my own mind that we two was sure to meet together again. It must have been a longish while after that, afore I got ashamed to go home. But I did get ashamed.

Thinks I, 'I haven't a rap in my pocket to show father, after being away all this time. I'm getting summut of a savage to look at already; and Mary would be more frightened than pleased to see me as I am now. I'll wait a bit,' says I, 'and see if I can't keep from tramping about, and try and get a little money, by doing some decent sort of work, afore I go home.' I was nigh about a good ten days' march then from any sea-port where honest work could be got for such as me; but I'd fixed to try, and I did try, and got work in a ship-builder's yard. It wasn't no good. Tramps' Fever was in my head, and in two days more I was off again to the wild country, with my gun over my shoulder, just as damned a vagabond as ever."

Mrs. Peckover held up her hands in mute amazement. Matthew, without taking notice of the action, went on, speaking partly to her and partly to himself.

"It must have been about that time when Mary and father, and all what had to do with them, begun to drop out of my head. But I kep' them two knick-knacks, which was once meant for presents for her—long after I'd lost all clear notion of ever going back home again, I kep' 'em—from first to

last I kep' 'em—I can't hardly say why ; unless it was that I'd got so used to keeping of them that I hadn't the heart somehow to let 'em go. Not, mind ye, but what they mightn't now and then have set me thinking of father and Mary at home—at times, you know, when I changed 'em from one bag to another, or took and blew the dust off of 'em, for to keep 'em as nice as I could. But the older I got, the worse I got at calling anything to mind in a clear way about Mary and the old country. There seemed to be a sort of fog rolling up between us, now. I couldn't see her face clear, in my own mind, no longer. It come upon me once or twice in dreams, when I nodded alone over my fire after a tough day's march—it come upon me at such times so clear, that it startled me up, all in a cold sweat, wild and puzzled with not knowing at first whether the stars was shimmering down at me in father's paddock at Dibbledean, or in the lonesome places over the sea, hundreds of miles away from any living soul. But that was only dreams, you know. Waking, I was all astray now, whenever I fell a-thinking about father or her. The longer I tramped it over the lonesome places, the thicker that fog got which seemed to have rose up in my mind



between me and them I'd left at home. At last, it come to darken in altogether; and never lifted no more that I can remember, till I crossed the seas again, and got back to my own country."

"But how did you ever think of coming back, after all those years?" asked Mrs. Peckover.

"Well, I got a good heap of money, for once in a way, with digging for gold in California," he answered; "and my mate that I worked with, he says to me one day:—'I don't see my way to how we are to spend our money, now we've got it, if we stop here. What can we treat ourselves to in this place, except bad brandy and cards? Let's go over to the old country, where there ain't nothing we want that we can't get for our money; and, when it's all gone, let's turn tail again, and work for more.' He wrought upon me, like that, till I went back with him. We quarrelled aboard ship; and when we got into port, he went his way and I went mine. Not, mind ye, that I started off at once for the old place as soon as I was ashore. That fog in my mind, I told you of, seemed to lift a little when I heard my own language, and saw my own country-people's faces about me again. And then there come a sort of fear over me—a fear of going back home at

all, after the time I'd been away. I got over it, though, and went in a day or two. When I first laid my hand on the churchyard gate that Mary and me used to swing on, and when I looked up at the old house, with the gable-ends just what they used to be (though the front was new painted, and strange names was over the shop-door), then all my time in the wild country seemed to shrivel up somehow, and better than twenty year ago begun to be a'most like yesterday. I'd seen father's name in the churchyard—which was no more than I looked for; but when they told me Mary had never been brought back, and said she'd died many a year ago among strange people, they cut me to the quick."

"Ah! no wonder, no wonder!"

"It was a wonder to *me*, though. I should have laughed at any man, if he'd told me I should be took so at hearing what I heard about her, after all the time I'd been away. I couldn't make it out then, and I can't now. I didn't feel like my own man, when I first set eyes on the old place. And then to hear she was dead—it cut me, as I told you. It cut me deeper still, when I come to tumble over the things she'd left behind her in her box. Twenty year ago got nigher and nigher to yesterday with

every fresh thing belonging to her that I laid a hand on. There was a arbour in father's garden she used to be fond of working in of evenings. I'd lost all thought of that place for more years than I can reckon up. I called it to mind again—and called *her* to mind again, too, sitting and working and singing in the arbour—only with laying holt of a bit of patch-work stuff in the bottom of her box, with her needle and thread left sticking in it."

"Ah, dear, dear!" sighed Mrs. Peckover, "I wish I'd seen her then! She was as happy, I dare say, as the bird on the tree. But there's one thing I can't exactly make out yet," she added—"how did you first come to know all about Mary's child?"

"All? There wasn't no *all* in it, till I see the child herself. Except knowing that the poor creeter's baby had been born alive, I knowed nothing when I first come away from the old place in the country. Child! I hadn't nothing of the sort in my mind, when I got back to London. It was how to track the man as was Mary's death, that I puzzled and worried about in my head, at that time——"

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Peckover, interposing to keep him away from the dangerous subject, as she heard his voice change, and saw his eyes begin to

brighten again. "Yes, yes—but how did you come to see the child? Tell me that."

"Zack took me into the Painter Man's big room——"

"Zack! Why, good gracious Heavens! do you mean Master Zachary Thorpe?"

"I see a young woman standing among a lot of people as was all a staring at her," continued Mat, without noticing the interruption. "I see her just as close to, and as plain, as I see you. I see her look up, all of a sudden, front face to front face with me. A creeping and a crawling went through me; and I says to myself, 'Mary's child has lived to grow up, and that's her.'"

"But, do pray tell me, how ever you come to know Master Zack?"

"I says to myself, 'That's her,'" repeated Mat, his rough voice sinking lower and lower, his attention wandering farther and farther away from Mrs. Peckover's interruptions. "Twenty year ago had got to be like yesterday, when I was down at the old place; and things I hadn't called to mind for long times past, I called to mind when I come to the church-yard gate, and see father's house. But there was looks Mary had with her eyes, turns Mary had with

her head, bits of twitches Mary had with her eyebrows when she looked up at you, that I'd clean forgot. They all come back to me together, as soon as ever I see that young woman's face."

"And do you really never mean to let her know who you are? You may tell me that, surely—though you won't speak a word about Master Zack."

"When I'm going back to the wild country, I may say to her: 'Rough as I am to look at, I'm your mother's brother, and you're the only bit of my own flesh and blood I've got left to cotton to in all the world. Give us a shake of your hand, and a kiss for mother's sake; and I won't trouble you no more.' I *may* say that, afore I go back, and lose sight of her for good and all."

"Oh, but you won't go back. Only you tell Mr. Blyth you don't want to take her away, and then say to him, 'I'm Mr. Grice, and—' "

"Stop! Don't you get a-talking about Mr. Grice."

"Why not? It's your lawful name, is'nt it?"

"Lawful enough, I dare say. But I don't like the sound of it, though it *is* mine. Father as good as said he was *ashamed* to own it, when he wrote me that letter; and I was *afraid* to own it,

when I deserted from my ship. Bad luck has followed the name from first to last. I ended with it years ago, and I won't take up with it again now. Call me 'Mat.' Take it as easy with me as if I was kin to you."

"Well, then—Mat," said Mrs. Peckover with a smile. "I've got such a many things to ask you still ——"

"I wish you could make it out to ask them to-morrow," rejoined Mathew. "I've overdone myself already, with more talking than I'm used to. I want to be quiet with my tongue, and get to work with my hands for the rest of the day. You don't happen to have a foot-rule in the house, do you?"

On being asked to explain what motive could possibly induce him to make this strangely abrupt demand for a foot-rule, Mat immediately admitted that he was anxious to proceed at once to the renewal of the cross-board at the head of his sister's grave. He wanted the rule to measure the dimensions of the old board; he desired to be directed to some timber-merchant's, where he could buy a new piece of wood; and, after that, he would worry Mrs. Peckover, he said, about nothing more. Extraordinary as his present caprice appeared to her,




the good woman saw that it had taken complete possession of him, and wisely and willingly set herself to humour it. She procured for him the rule, and the address of a timber-merchant; and then they parted, Mat promising to call again in the evening at Dawson's Buildings.

When he presented himself at the timber-merchant's, after having carefully measured the old board in the churchyard, he came in no humour to be easily satisfied. Never was any fine lady more difficult to decide about the texture, pattern, and colour to be chosen for a new dress, than Mat was when he arrived at the timber-merchant's, about the grain, thickness, and kind of wood to be chosen for the cross-board at the head of Mary's grave. At last, he selected a piece of walnut-wood; and, having paid the price demanded for it, without any haggling, enquired next for a carpenter, of whom he might hire a set of tools. A man who has money to spare, has all things at his command. Before evening, Mat had a complete set of tools, a dry shed to use them in, and a comfortable living-room at a public-house near, all at his own sole disposal.

Being skilful enough at all carpenter's work of an ordinary kind, he would, under most circumstances,

have completed in a day or two such an employment as he had now undertaken. But a strange fastidiousness, a most uncharacteristic anxiety about the smallest matters, delayed him through every stage of his present undertaking. Mrs. Peckover, who came every morning to see how he was getting on, was amazed at the slowness of his progress. He was from the first, morbidly scrupulous in keeping the board smooth and clean. After he had shaped it, and fitted it to its upright supports ; after he had cut in it (by Mrs. Peckover's advice) the same inscription which had been placed on the old board, the simple initials "M. G.," with the year of Mary's death, "1828"—after he had done these things, he was seized with an unreasonable, obstinate fancy, for decorating the board at the sides. In spite of all that Mrs. Peckover could say to prevent him, he carved an anchor at one side, and a tomahawk at the other—these being the objects with which he was most familiar, and therefore the objects which he chose to represent. But even when the carving of his extraordinary ornaments had been completed, he could not be prevailed on to set the new cross-board up in its proper place. Fondly as artists or authors linger over their last loving touches to the picture



or the book, did Mat now linger, day after day, over the poor monument to his sister's memory which his own rough hands had made. He smoothed it carefully with bits of sand-paper, he rubbed it industriously with leather, he polished it anxiously with oil, until, at last, Mrs. Peckover lost all patience; and, trusting in the influence she had already gained over him, fairly insisted on his bringing his work to a close. Even while obeying her, he was still true to his first resolution. He had said that no man's hand should help him in the labour he had now undertaken; and he was as good as his word, for he carried the cross-board himself to the churchyard.

All this time, he never once looked at that lock of hair which he had been accustomed to take so frequently from his pocket but a few days back. Perhaps there was nothing in common between the thought of tracing Arthur Carr and the thoughts of Mary, that came to him while he was at work on the walnut-wood plank.

But when the cross-board had been set up; when he had cleared away the mud and brambles about the mound, and had made a smooth little path round it; when he had looked at his work from all points of

view, and had satisfied himself that he could do nothing more to perfect it, the active, restless, and violent elements in his nature seemed to awake, as it were, on a sudden. His fingers began to search again in his pocket for the fatal lock of hair; and when he and Mrs. Peckover next met, the first words he addressed to her announced his immediate departure for Dibbledean.

She had strengthened her hold on his gratitude by getting him permission, through the Rector of Bangbury, to occupy himself, without molestation, in the work of repairing his sister's grave. She had persuaded him to confide to her many of the particulars concerning himself which he had refused to communicate at their first interview. But when she tried, at parting, to fathom what his ultimate intentions really were, now that he was leaving Bangbury with the avowed purpose of discovering Arthur Carr, she failed to extract from him a single sentence of explanation, or even so much as a word of reply. When he took his farewell, he charged her not to communicate their meeting to Mr. Blyth, till she heard from him or saw him again; and he tried once more to thank her in as fit words as he could command, for the pity and kindness she had shown

towards Mary Grice; but, to the very last, he closed his lips resolutely on the ominous subject of Arthur Carr.

He had been a fortnight absent from London, when he set forth once more for Dibbledean, to try that last chance of tracing out the hidden man which might be afforded him by a search among the papers of Johanna Grice.

The astonishment and delight of Mr. Tatt when Matthew, appearing in the character of a client at the desolate office door, actually announced himself as the sole surviving son of old Joshua Grice, flowed out in such a sudden torrent of congratulatory words, that Mat was at first literally overwhelmed by them. He soon recovered himself, however; and while Mr. Tatt was still haranguing fluently about proving his client's identity, and securing his client's rights of inheritance, silenced that ardent and neglected solicitor, by declaring as bluntly as usual, that he had not come to Dibbledean to be helped to get hold of money, but to be helped to get hold of Johanna Grice's papers. This extraordinary announcement produced a long explanation and a still longer discussion, in the middle of which Mat lost his patience, and declared that he would

set aside all legal obstacles and delays forthwith, by going to Mr. Nawby's office, and demanding of that gentleman, as the official guardian of the late Miss Grice's papers, permission to look over the different documents which the old woman might have left behind her.

It was to no earthly purpose that Mr. Tatt represented this course of proceeding as unprofessional, injudicious, against etiquette, and generally ruinous, looked at from any point of view. While he was still expostulating, Matthew was stepping out at the door; and Mr. Tatt, who could not afford to lose even this most outrageous and unmanageable of clients, had no other alternative but to make the best of it, and run out after him.

Mr. Nawby was a remarkably lofty, solemn, and ceremonious gentleman, feeling as bitter a hatred and scorn for Mr. Tatt as it is well possible for one legal human being to entertain towards another. There is no doubt that he would have received the highly irregular visit of which he was now the object with the most chilling contempt, if he had only been allowed time to assert his own dignity. But before he could utter a single word, Matthew, in defiance of all that Mr. Tatt could say to silence

him, first announced himself in his proper character; and then, after premising that he came to worry nobody about money-matters, coolly added that he wanted to look over the late Johanna Grice's letters and papers directly, for a purpose which was not of the smallest consequence to anyone but himself.

Under ordinary circumstances, Mr. Nawby would have simply declined to hold any communication with Mat, until his identity had been legally proved. But the great and prosperous solicitor of Dibbledean had a grudge against the audacious adventurer who had set up in practice against him; and he therefore resolved to depart a little on this occasion from the strictly professional course, for the express purpose of depriving Mr. Tatt of as many prospective six-and-eight-pences as possible. Waving his hand solemnly, when Mat had done speaking, he said: "Wait a moment, sir;" then rang a bell and ordered in his head clerk.

"Now, Mr. Scutt," said Mr. Nawby, loftily addressing the clerk, "have the goodness to be a witness in the first place, that I protest against this visit on Mr. Tatt's part, as being indecorously unprofessional and grossly unbusiness-like. In the second place, be a witness, also, that I do not admit

the identity of this party," pointing to Mat, "and that what I am now about to say to him, I say under protest, and denying *pro forma* that he is the party he represents himself to be. You understand, Mr. Scutt?"

Mr. Scutt bowed reverently. Mr. Nawby pompously went on.

"If your business connection, sir, with that party," he said, addressing Matthew and indicating Mr. Tatt, "was only entered into to forward the purpose you have just mentioned to me, I beg to inform you (denying, you will understand, at the same time, your right to ask for such information) that you may wind up matters with your solicitor whenever you please. The late Miss Grice has left neither letters nor papers. I destroyed them all, by her own wish, in her own presence, and under her own written authority, during her last illness. My head clerk here, who was present to assist me, will corroborate the statement, if you wish it."

Mat listened attentively to these words, but listened to nothing more. A sturdy legal altercation immediately ensued between the two solicitors—but it hardly reached his ears. Mr. Tatt took his arm, and led him out, talking more fluently than ever;

but he had not the poorest trifle of attention to bestow on Mr. Tatt. All his faculties together seemed to be absorbed by this one momentous consideration: Had he now, really and truly lost the last chance of tracing Arthur Carr?


When they got into the High Street, his mind somewhat recovered its freedom of action, and he began to feel the necessity of deciding at once on his future movements. Now that his final resource had failed him, what should he do next? It was useless to go back to Bangbury, useless to remain at Dibbledean. Yet the fit was on him to be moving again somewhere — better even to return to Kirk Street than to remain irresolute and inactive on the scene of his defeat.

He stopped suddenly; and saying—"It's no good waiting here now; I shall go back to London;" impatiently shook himself free of Mr. Tatt's arm in a moment. He found it by no means so easy, however, to shake himself free of Mr. Tatt's legal services. "Depend on my zeal," cried this energetic solicitor, following Matthew pertinaciously on his way to the station. "If there's law in England, your identity shall be proved and your rights respected. I intend to throw myself into this case,

heart and soul. Money, Justice, Morality, and —One moment, my dear sir! If you must really go back to London, oblige me at any rate, with your address, and just state in a cursory way, whether you were christened or not at Dibbledean church. I want nothing more to begin with — absolutely nothing more, on my word of honour as a professional man.”

Willing in his present mood to say or do anything to get rid of his volunteer solicitor, Mat mentioned his address in Kirk Street, and the name by which he was known there,—impatiently said “Yes,” to the inquiry as to whether he had been christened at Dibbledean church, and then abruptly turning away, left Mr. Tatt standing in the middle of the high road, excitably making a note of the evidence just collected, in a new legal memorandum-book.

As soon as Mat was alone, the ominous question suggested itself to him again: Had he lost the last chance of tracing Arthur Carr? Although inexorable facts seemed now to prove past contradiction that he had, even yet he held to his old superstition more doggedly and desperately than ever. Once more, on his way to the station, he pulled out the lock of hair, and obstinately pondered over it.



Once more, while he journeyed to London, that strange conviction upheld him, which had already supported him under previous checks. "I shall find him," thought Mat, whirling along in the train. "I don't care where he's hid away from me, I shall find him yet!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRACING OF ARTHUR CARR.

WHILE Matthew Grice was travelling backwards and forwards between town and town in the mid-land counties, the life led by his gallant young friend and comrade in the metropolis, was by no means totally devoid of incident and change. Zack had met with his adventures as well as Mat; one of them, in particular, being of such a nature, or, rather, leading to such results, as materially altered the domestic aspect of the lodgings in Kirk Street.

True to his promise to Valentine, Zack, on the morning of his friend's departure for the country, presented himself at Mr. Strather's house, with his letter of introduction, punctually at eleven o'clock; and was fairly started in life by that gentleman, before noon on the same day, as a student of the

Classic beau-ideal in the statue-halls of the British Museum. He worked away resolutely enough till the rooms were closed; and then returned to Kirk Street, not by any means enthusiastically devoted to his new occupation; but determined to persevere in it, because he was determined to keep to his word.

His new profession wore, however, a much more encouraging aspect when Mr. Strather introduced him, in the evening, to the Little Bilge Street Academy. Here, live people were the models to study from. Here he was free to use the palette, and to mix up the pinkest imaginable flesh tints with bran-new brushes. Here were high-spirited students of the fine arts, easy in manners and picturesque in personal appearance, with whom he contrived to get intimate directly. And here, to crown all, was a Model, sitting for the chest and arms, who had been a great prize-fighter, and with whom Zack joyfully cemented the bonds of an eternal (pugilistic) friendship, on the first night of his admission to Mr. Strather's Academy.

All through the second day of his probation as a student, he laboured at his drawing with immense resolution and infinitesimal progress. All through the evening he daubed away industriously under

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Mr. Strather's supervision, until the Academy sitting was suspended. It would have been well for him if he had gone home as soon as he laid down his brushes. But in an evil hour he lingered in Little Bilge-street, after the studies of the evening were over, to have a gossip with the prize-fighting Model, and in an indiscreet moment he consented to officiate as one of the patrons at an exhibition of sparring, to be held that night at a neighbouring tavern, for the ex-pugilist's benefit.

By no part of their conduct do the gentlemen connected with the Prize Ring show their freedom and independence of spirit more remarkably, than by their behaviour under that patronage for which they are incessantly clamouring, and which, when they get it, they usually study to deserve by picking a patron's pockets, knocking a patron's hat over his eyes, or subjecting a patron generally to almost every known variety of bodily ill-usage. Zack was not destined to escape paying the customary penalty for the privilege and honour of patronising a mixed society of prize-fighters. After being conducted in an orderly manner enough for some little time, the pugilistic proceedings of the evening were suddenly interrupted by one of the Patrons present (who was

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also a student at the Bilge-street Academy), declaring that his pocket had been picked, and insisting that the room door should be closed and the police summoned immediately. Great confusion and disturbance ensued, amid which Zack supported the demand of his fellow-student—perhaps a little too warmly. At any rate a gentleman sitting opposite to him, with a patch over one eye, and a nose broken in three places, swore that young Thorpe had personally insulted him by implying that he was the thief, and vindicated his moral character by throwing a cheese-plate at Zack's head. The missile struck the mark (at the side, however, instead of in front), and breaking when it struck, inflicted what appeared to every unprofessional eye that looked at the injury like a very extensive and dangerous wound.

The chemist to whom Zack was taken in the first instance to be bandaged, thought little of the hurt; but the local doctor who was called in, after the lad's removal to Kirk Street, did not take so reassuring a view of the patient's case. The wound was certainly not situated in a very dangerous part of the head; but it had been inflicted at a time when Zack's naturally full-blooded constitution was in a very unhealthy condition, from the effects of much more



ardent spirit-drinking than was at all good for him. Bad fever-symptoms set in immediately, and appearances became visible in the neighbourhood of the wound, at which the medical head shook ominously. —In short, Zack was now confined to his bed, with the worst illness he had ever had in his life, and with no friend to look after him except the landlady of the house.

Fortunately for him, his doctor was a man of skill and energy, who knew how to make the most of all the advantages which the patient's youth and strength could offer to assist the medical treatment. In ten days' time, young Thorpe was out of danger of any of the serious inflammatory results which had been apprehended from the injury to his head.

Wretchedly weak and reduced—unwilling to alarm his mother by informing her of his illness—without Valentine to console him, or Mat to amuse him, Zack's spirits now sank to a far lower ebb than they had ever fallen to before. In his present state of depression, feebleness, and solitude, there were moments where he doubted of his own recovery, in spite of all that the doctor could tell him. While in this frame of mind, the remembrance of the last sad report he had heard of his father's health, affected

him very painfully, and he bitterly condemned himself for never having written so much as a line to ask Mr. Thorpe's pardon since he had left home. He was too weak to use the pen himself; but the tobacconist's wife—a slovenly, showy, kind-hearted woman enough—was always ready to do anything to serve him; and he determined to make his mind a little easier by asking her to write a few penitent lines for him, and having the letter despatched immediately to his father's address in Baregrove Square. She had long since been made the confidant of all his domestic tribulations (for he freely communicated them to everybody with whom he was brought much in contact), and showed, therefore, no surprise, but on the contrary expressed great satisfaction when his request was preferred to her. This was the letter which Zack, with tearful eyes, and faltering voice, dictated to his landlady:—

“MY DEAR FATHER,—I am truly sorry for never having written to ask you to forgive me before. I write now, and beg your pardon with all my heart, for I am indeed very penitent, and ashamed of myself. If you will only let me have another trial, and will not be too hard upon me at first, I will do my best

never to give you any more trouble. Therefore, pray write to me at 14, Kirk Street, Wendover-market, where I am now living with a friend who has been very kind to me. Please give my dear love to mother, and believe me your truly penitent son,

“Z. THORPE, jun.”

Having got through this letter pretty easily, and finding that the tobacconist's wife was quite ready to write another for him, if he pleased, Zack resolved to send a line to Mr. Blyth, who, as well as he could calculate, might now be expected to return from the country every day. On the evening when he had been brought home with the wound in his head, he had entreated that his accident might be kept a secret from Mrs. Blyth (who knew his address), in case she should send after him. This preliminary word of caution was not uselessly spoken. Only three days later a note was brought from Mrs. Blyth, upbraiding him for never having been near the house during Valentine's absence, and asking him to come and drink tea that evening. The messenger, who waited for an answer, was sent back with the most artful verbal excuse which the landlady could provide for the emergency, and no more notes had been

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delivered since. Mrs. Blyth was doubtless not over well satisfied with the cool manner in which her invitation had been received.

In his present condition of spirits, Zack's conscience upbraided him soundly for having thought of deceiving Valentine by keeping him in ignorance of what had happened. Now that Mat seemed, by his long absence, to have deserted Kirk Street for ever, there was a double attraction and hope for the weary and heart-sick Zack in the prospect of seeing the painter's genial face by his bedside. To this oldest, kindest, and most merciful of friends, therefore, he determined to confess, what he dare not so much as hint to his own father.

The note which, by the assistance of the tobacconist's wife, he now addressed to Valentine, was as characteristically boyish, and even childish in tone, as the note he had dictated to send to his father. It ran thus:—

“MY DEAR BLYTH,—I begin almost to wish that I had never been born; for I have got into another scrape; having been knocked on the head by a prize-fighter with a cheese-plate. It was wrong in me to go where I did, I know. But I went to Mr. Strather,

just as you told me, and stuck to my drawing—I did indeed! Pray do come, as soon as ever you get back—I send this letter to make sure of getting you at once. I am so miserable and lonely, and too weak still to get out of bed.

“My landlady is very good and kind to me; but, as for that old vagabond, Mat, he has been away in the country, I don’t know how long, and has never written to me. Please, please do come! and don’t blow me up much if you can help it, for I am so weak still I can hardly keep from crying when I think of what has happened. Ever yours,

“Z. THORPE, jun.

“P.S. If you have got any of my money left by you, I should be very glad if you would bring it. I havn’t a farthing, and there are several little things I ought to pay for.”

This letter, and the letter to Mr. Thorpe, after being duly sealed and directed, were confided for delivery to a private messenger. They were written on the same day which had been occupied by Matthew Grice in visiting Mr. Tatt and Mr. Nawby, at Dibbledean. And the coincidences of time so ordered it, that while Zack’s letters were proceeding

to their destinations, in the hand of the messenger, Zack's fellow-lodger was also proceeding to *his* destination in Kirk Street, by the fast London train.

Baregrove Square was nearer to the messenger than Valentine's house, so the first letter that he delivered was that all-important petition for the paternal pardon, on the favourable reception of which depended Zack's last chance of reconciliation with home.

Mr. Thorpe sat alone in his dining-parlour—the same dining-parlour in which, so many weary years ago, he had argued with old Mr. Goodworth, about his son's education. Mrs. Thorpe, being confined to her room by a severe cold, was unable to keep him company—the doctor had just taken leave of him—friends in general were forbidden, on medical authority, to excite him by visits—he was left lonely, and he had the prospect of remaining lonely for the rest of the day. On the table beneath him was placed one of his volumes of autographs. He had evidently been looking over it to see if it wanted any cleansing or repairing, for his little bottle of gum-water, his camel's-hair brush, and his magnifying glass, all lay within reach. That total prostration of the nervous system, from which

the doctor had declared him to be now suffering, showed itself painfully, from time to time, in his actions as well as his looks—in his sudden startings when an unexpected noise occurred in the house, and in the trembling of his wan, yellowish-white hand whenever he lifted it from the table, as well as in the transparent paleness of his cheeks, and the anxious uncertainty of his ever-wandering eyes.

His attention was just now no longer directed on his volume of autographs. He was looking down at an open letter lying near it—a letter fitted to encourage and console him, if any earthly hopes could still speak of happiness to his heart, or any earthly solace still administer repose to his mind.

But a few days back, his wife's entreaties, and the doctor's advice had at length prevailed on him to consult his health and increase his chances of recovery, by resigning the post of secretary to one of the Religious Societies to which he belonged. The letter he was now looking at, had been written officially to inform him that the members of the Society accepted his resignation with the deepest regret, and the most fervent hopes for his recovery, and to prepare him for a visit on the morrow from a deputation charged to present him with an address and testi-

monial, unanimously voted by the Society "in grateful and affectionate recognition of his high character and eminent services, while acting as their secretary." He had not been able to resist the temptation of showing this letter to the doctor ; and he could not refrain from reading it once again now, before he put it back in his desk. It was, in his eyes, the great reward and the great distinction of his life.

He was still lingering thoughtfully over the last sentence, when Zack's letter was brought in to him. It was only for a moment that he had dared to taste again the sweetness of a well-won triumph—but even in that moment, there mingled with it the poisoning bitter of every past association that could pain him most!—With a heavy sigh, he put away the letter from the friends who honoured him, and prepared to answer the letter from the son who had deserted him.

There was grief, but no anger in his face, as he read it over for the second time. He sat thinking for a little while—then drew towards him his ink-stand and paper—hesitated—wrote a few lines—and paused again, putting down the pen this time, and covering his eyes with his thin trembling hand.

After sitting thus for some minutes, he seemed to despair of being able to collect his thoughts immediately, and to resolve on giving his mind full time to compose itself. He shut up his son's letter and his own unfinished reply together in the paper-case. But there was some re-assuring promise for Zack's future prospects contained even in the little that he had already written; and the letter suggested forgiveness at the very outset, for it began with, "My dear Zachary."

On delivering the second note at Valentine's house, the messenger was informed that Mr. Blyth was expected back on the next day, or on the day after that, at the latest. Having a discretionary power to deal as she pleased with her husband's correspondence, when he was away from home, Mrs. Blyth opened the letter as soon as it was taken up to her. Madonna was in the room at the time, with her bonnet and shawl on, just ready to go out for her usual daily walk, with Patty the housemaid for a companion, in Valentine's absence.

"Oh, that wretched, wretched Zack!" exclaimed Mrs. Blyth, looking seriously distressed and alarmed, the moment her eyes fell on the first lines of the



letter. "He must be ill indeed," she added, looking closely at the handwriting; "for he has evidently not written this himself."

Madonna could not hear these words, but she could see the expression which accompanied their utterance, and could indicate by a sign her anxiety to know what had happened. Mrs. Blyth ran her eye quickly over the letter, and ascertaining that there was nothing in it which Madonna might not be allowed to read, beckoned to the girl to look over her shoulder, as the easiest and shortest way of explaining what was the matter.

"How distressed Valentine will be to hear of this!" thought Mrs. Blyth, summoning Patty upstairs by a pull at her bell-rope, while Madonna was eagerly reading the letter. The housemaid appeared immediately, and was charged by her mistress to go to Kirk Street at once; and after inquiring of the landlady about Zack's health, to get a written list of any comforts he might want, and bring it back as soon as possible. And mind you leave a message," pursued Mrs. Blyth, in conclusion, "to say that he need not trouble himself about money matters, for your master will come back from the country, either to-morrow or next day."

Here, her attention was suddenly arrested by Madonna, who was eagerly and even impatiently signing on her fingers: "What are you saying to Patty? Oh! do let me know what you are saying to Patty?"

Mrs. Blyth repeated, by means of the deaf-and-dumb alphabet, the instructions which she had just given to the servant; and added—observing the paleness and agitation of Madonna's face—"Let us not frighten ourselves unnecessarily, my dear, about Zack; he may turn out to be much better than we think him from reading his letter."

"May I go with Patty?" rejoined Madonna, her eyes sparkling with anxiety, her fingers trembling as they rapidly formed these words. "Let me take my walk with Patty, just as if nothing had happened. Let me go! pray, let me go!"

"She can't be of any use, poor child," thought Mrs. Blyth; "but if I keep her here, she will only be fretting herself into one of her violent headaches. Besides, she may as well have her walk now, for I shan't be able to spare Patty later in the day." Influenced by these considerations, Mrs. Blyth, by a nod, intimated to her adopted child that she might accompany the housemaid to Kirk Street. Madonna,

the moment this permission was granted, led the way out of the room ; but stopped as soon as she and Patty were alone on the staircase, and, making a sign that she would be back directly, ran up to her own bed-chamber.

When she entered the room, she unlocked a little dressing-case that Valentine had given to her ; and, emptying out of one of the trays four sovereigns and some silver, all her savings from her own pocket-money, wrapped them up hastily in a piece of paper, and ran down-stairs again to Patty. Zack was ill, and lonely, and miserable ; longing for a friend to sit by his bedside and comfort him—and she could not be that friend ! But Zack was also poor ; she had read it in his letter ; there were many little things he wanted to pay for ; he needed money—and in that need she might secretly be a friend to him, for she had money of her own to give away. “ My four golden sovereigns shall be the first he has,” thought Madonna, nervously taking the house-maid’s offered arm at the house-door. “ I will put them in some place where he is sure to find them, and never to know who they come from. And Zack shall be rich again—rich with all the money I have got to give him.” Four sovereigns represented quite

a little fortune in Madonna's eyes. It had taken her a long, long time to save them out of her small allowance of pocket-money.

When they knocked at the private door of the tobacco-shop, it was opened by the landlady, who, after hearing what their errand was from Patty, and answering some preliminary inquiries after Zack, politely invited them to walk into her back parlour. But Madonna seemed—quite incomprehensibly to the servant—to be bent on remaining in the passage till she had finished writing some lines which she just then began to trace on her slate. When they were completed, she showed them to Patty, who read with considerable astonishment these words: "Ask where his sitting-room is, and if I can go into it. I want to leave something for him there with my own hands, if the room is empty."

After looking at her young mistress's eager face in great amazement for a moment or two, Patty asked the required questions; prefacing them with some words of explanation which drew from the tobacconist's wife many voluble expressions of sympathy and admiration for Madonna. At last, these came to an end; and the desired answers to the questions on the slate were given readily enough,

and duly, though rather slowly, written down by Patty, for her young lady's benefit. The sitting-room belonging to Mr. Thorpe and the other gentleman, was the front room on the first floor. Nobody was in it now. Would the lady like to be shown——

Here Madonna arrested the servant's further progress with the slate pencil—nodded to indicate that she understood what had been written—and then, with her little packet of money ready in her hand, lightly ran up the first flight of stairs; ascending them so quickly that she was on the landing before Patty and the landlady had settled which of the two ought to have officially preceded her.

The front room was indeed empty when she entered it, but one of the folding doors leading into the back room had been left ajar; and when she looked towards the opening thus made, she also looked, from the particular point of view she then occupied, towards the head of the bed on which Zack lay, and saw his face turned towards her, hushed in deep, still, breathless sleep.

She started violently—trembled a little—then stood motionless, looking towards him through the door; the tears standing thick in her eyes, the colour gone from her cheeks, the yearning pulses of grief

and pity beating faster and faster in her heart. Ah! how pale and wan, and piteously still he lay there, with the ghastly white bandages round his head, and one helpless, languid hand hanging over the bedside! How changed from that glorious creature, all youth, health, strength, and exulting activity, whom it had so long been her innocent idolatry to worship in secret! How fearfully like what might be the image of him in death, was this present image of him as he lay in his hushed and awful sleep! She shuddered as the thought crossed her mind, and drying the tears that obscured her sight, turned a little away from him, and looked round the room. Her quick feminine eyes detected at a glance all its squalid disorder, all its deplorable defects of comfort, all its repulsive unfitness as a habitation for the suffering and the sick. Surely a little money might help Zack to a better place to recover in! Surely *her* money might be made to minister in this way to his comfort, his happiness, and even his restoration to health!

Full of this idea, she advanced a step or two, and sought for a proper place on the one table in the room, in which she might put her packet of money. While she was thus engaged, an old newspaper,

with some hair lying in it, caught her eye. The hair was Zack's, and was left to be thrown away; having been cut off that very morning by the doctor, who thought that enough had not been removed from the neighbourhood of the wound by the barber originally employed to clear the hair from the injured side of the patient's head. Madonna had hardly looked at the newspaper before she recognised the hair in it as Zack's by its light-brown colour, and by the faint golden tinge running through it. One little curly lock, lying rather apart from the rest, especially allured her eyes; she longed to take it as a keepsake—a keepsake which Zack would never know that she possessed! For a moment she hesitated, and in that moment the longing became an irresistible temptation. After glancing over her shoulder to assure herself that no one had followed her upstairs, she took the lock of hair, and quickly hid it away in her bosom.

Her eyes had assured her that there was no one in the room: but, if she had not been deprived of the sense of hearing, she would have known that persons were approaching it, by the sound of voices on the stairs—a man's voice being among them. Necessarily ignorant, however, of this, she advanced

unconcernedly, after taking the lock of hair, from the table to the chimney-piece, which it struck her might be the safest place to leave the money on. She had just put it down there, when she felt the slight concussion caused by the opening and closing of the door behind her; and turning round instantly, confronted Patty, the landlady, and the strange swarthy-faced friend of Zack's, who had made her a present of the scarlet tobacco-pouch.

Terror and confusion almost overpowered her, as she saw him advance to the chimney-piece and take up the packet she had just placed there. He had evidently opened the room-door in time to see her put it down; and he was now deliberately unfolding the paper and examining the money inside. While he was thus occupied, Patty came close up to her, and, with rather a confused and agitated face, began writing on her slate, much faster and much less correctly than usual. She gathered, however, from the few crooked lines scrawled by the servant, that Patty had been very much startled by the sudden entrance of the landlady's rough lodger, who had let himself in from the street, just as she was about to follow her young mistress up to the sitting-room, and had uncivilly

stood in her way on the stairs, while he listened to what the good woman of the house had to tell him about young Mr. Thorpe's illness. Confused as the writing was on the slate, Madonna contrived to interpret it thus far, and would have gone on interpreting more, if she had not felt a heavy hand laid on her arm, and had not, on looking round, seen Zack's friend making signs to her, with her money loose in his hand.

She felt confused, but not frightened now ; for his eyes, as she looked into them, expressed neither suspicion nor anger. They rested on her face kindly and sadly, while he first pointed to the money in his hand, and then to her. She felt that her colour was rising, and that it was a hard matter to acknowledge the gold and silver as being her own property ; but she did so acknowledge it. He then pointed to himself ; and when she shook her head, pointed through the folding doors into Zack's room. Her cheeks began to burn, she grew suddenly afraid to look at him ; but it was no harder trial to confess the truth, than shamelessly to deny it by making a false sign. So she looked up at him again and bravely nodded her head.

His eyes seemed to grow clearer and softer as

they still rested kindly on her; but he made her take back the money immediately; and, holding her hand as he did so, detained it for a moment with a curious awkward gentleness. Then, after first pointing again to Zack's room, he began to search in the breast-pocket of his coat, took from it at one rough grasp some letters tied together loosely, and a clumsy-looking rolled-up strip of fur, put the letters aside on the table behind him, and, unrolling the fur, showed her that there were bank-notes in it. She understood him directly—he had money of his own for Zack's service, and wanted none from her.

After he had replaced the strip of fur in his pocket, he took up the letters from the table to be put back also. As he reached them towards him, a lock of hair, which seemed to have accidentally got between them, fell out on the floor just at her feet. She stooped to pick it up for him; and was surprised as she did so, to see that it exactly resembled in colour the lock of Zack's hair which she had taken from the old newspaper, and had hidden in her bosom.

She was surprised at this: and she was more than surprised when he angrily and abruptly snatched up the lock of hair, just as she touched it. Did he

think that she wanted to take it away from him? If he did, it was easy to show him that a lock of Zack's hair was just now no such rarity that people need quarrel about the possession of it. She reached her hand to the table behind, and taking some of the hair from the old newspaper, held it up to him with a smile, just as he was on the point of putting his own lock of hair back in his pocket.

For a moment he did not seem to comprehend what her action meant; then, the resemblance between the hair in her hand and the hair in his own, appeared to strike him suddenly. The whole expression of his face changed in an instant—changed so darkly that she recoiled from him in terror, and put back the hair into the newspaper. He pounced on it directly; and, crunching it up in his hand, turned his grim, threatening face and fiercely-questioning eyes on the landlady. While she was answering his inquiry, Madonna saw him look towards Zack's bed; and, as he looked, another change passed over his face—the darkness faded from it, and the red scars on his cheek deepened in colour. He moved back slowly to the further corner of the room from the folding-doors; his restless eyes fixed in a vacant stare, one of his

hands clutched round the old newspaper, the other motioning clumsily and impatiently to the astonished and alarmed women to leave him.

Madonna had felt Patty's hand pulling at her arm more than once during the last minute or two. She was now quite as anxious as her companion to quit the house. They went out quickly, not venturing to look at Mat again; and the landlady followed them. She and Patty had a long talk together at the street door—evidently, judging by the expression of their faces, about the conduct of the rough lodger up-stairs. But Madonna felt no desire to be informed particularly of what they were saying to each other. Much as Matthew's strange behaviour had surprised and startled her, he was not the uppermost subject in her mind, just then. It was the discovery of her secret, the failure of her little plan for helping Zack with her own money, that she was now thinking of with equal confusion and dismay. She had not been in the front room at Kirk Street much more than five minutes altogether—yet what a succession of untoward events had passed in that short space of time!

For a long while after the women had left him,

Mat stood motionless in the furthest corner of the room from the folding doors, looking vacantly towards Zack's bedchamber. His first surprise on finding a stranger talking in the passage, when he let himself in from the street; his first vexation on hearing of Zack's accident from the landlady; his momentary impulse to discover himself to Mary's child, when he saw Madonna standing in his room, and again when he knew that she had come there with her little offering, for the one kind purpose of helping the sick lad in his distress—all these sensations were now gone from his memory as well as from his heart; absorbed in the one predominant emotion with which the discovery of the resemblance between Zack's hair and the hair from Jane Holdworth's letter now filled him. No ordinary shocks could strike Mat's mind hard enough to make it lose its balance—*this* shock prostrated it in an instant.

In proportion as he gradually recovered his self-possession, so did the desire strengthen in him to ascertain the resemblance between the two kinds of hair once more—but in such a manner as it had not been ascertained yet. He stole gently to the folding doors and looked into young Thorpe's room. Zack was still asleep.

After pausing for a moment, and shaking his head sorrowfully as he noticed how pale and wasted the lad's face looked, he approached the pillow, and laid the lock of Arthur Carr's hair upon it, close to the uninjured side of Zack's head. It was then late in the afternoon, but not dusk yet; no blind hung over the bedroom window, and all the light in the sky streamed full on to the pillow as his eyes fastened on it. The similarity between the sleeper's hair and the hair of Arthur Carr was perfect! Both were of the same light brown colour, and both had running through that colour, the same delicate golden tinge, brightly visible in the light, hardly to be detected at all in the shade.

Why had this extraordinary resemblance never struck him before? Perhaps, because he had never examined Arthur Carr's hair with attention, until he had possessed himself of Mary's bracelet, and had gone away to the country. Perhaps also because he had never yet taken notice enough of Zack's hair to care to look close at it. And now the resemblance was traced, to what conclusion did it point? Plainly, from Zack's youth, to none in connection with *him*. But what elder relatives had

he? and which of them was he most like? Did he take after his ——?

Mat was looking down at the sleeper, just then; something in the lad's face troubled him, and kept his mind from pursuing that last thought. He took the lock of hair from the pillow, and went into the front room. There was anxiety and almost dread in his face, as he thought of the fatally decisive question in relation to the momentous discovery he had just made, which must be addressed to Zack when he awoke. He had never really known how fond he was of his fellow lodger until now, when he was conscious of a dull, numbing sensation of dismay at the prospect of addressing that question to the friend who had lived as a brother with him since the day when they first met.

As the evening closed in, Zack woke. It was a relief to Mat, as he went to the bedside, to know that his face could not now be clearly seen. The burden of that terrible question pressed heavily on his heart, while he held his comrade's feeble hand; while he answered as considerately, yet as briefly as he could, the many inquiries addressed to him; and while he listened patiently and silently to the sufferer's long, wandering, faintly-uttered narrative of

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the accident that had befallen him. Towards the close of that narrative, Zack himself unconsciously led the way to the fatal question which Mat longed, yet dreaded to ask him.

"Well, old fellow," he said, turning feebly on his pillow so as to face Matthew, "as I told you, I've been so awfully down in the mouth I haven't known what to do. Something like, what you call, the 'horrors' has been taking hold of me. And this morning, in particular, I was so wretched and lonely (not knowing when you would come back, or whether you would ever come back at all) that I asked the landlady to write for me to my father, begging his pardon, and all that. I haven't behaved as well as I ought; and, somehow, when a fellow's ill and lonely he gets homesick, and—and——"

His voice began to grow faint, and he left the sentence unfinished.

"Zack," said Mat, turning his face away from the bed while he spoke, though it was now quite dark. "Zack, what sort of a man is your father?"

"What sort of a man! How do you mean?"

"To look at. Are you like him in the face?"

"Lord help you, Mat! as little like as possible. My father's face is all wrinkled and marked."

"Aye, aye, like other old men's faces. His hair's grey, I suppose?"

"Quite white. By-the-by—talking of that—there *is* one point I'm like him in—at least, like what he *was*, when he was a young man."

"What's that?"

"What we've been speaking of—his hair. I've heard my mother say, when she first married him—just shake up my pillow a bit, will you, Mat?"

"Yes, yes. And what did you hear your mother say?"

"Oh, nothing particular. Only that when he was a young man, his hair was exactly like what mine is now."

As those words were spoken, the landlady knocked at the door, and announced that she was waiting outside with candles, and a nice cup of tea for the invalid. Mat let her into the bedchamber—then immediately walked out of it into the front room, and closed the folding-doors behind him. Brave as he was, he was afraid, at that moment, to let Zack see his face.

He walked to the fireplace, and rested his head

and arm on the chimney-piece—reflected for a little while, in that position—then stood upright again—and searching in his pocket, drew from it once more that fatal lock of hair which he had examined so anxiously and so often during his past fortnight in the country.

“*Your* work’s done,” he said, looking at it for a moment, as it lay in his hand—then throwing it into the dull red fire which was now burning low in the grate. “*Your* work’s done ; and *mine* won’t be long a-doing.” He rested his head and arm again wearily on the chimney-piece, as he added :—

“ I’m brothers with Zack—that’s the hard part of it ! I’m brothers with Zack.”

CHAPTER X.

IS HE THE MAN ?

ON the forenoon of the day that followed Mat's return to Kirk Street, the ordinarily dull aspect of Baregrove Square was enlivened by a procession of three handsome private carriages which stopped at Mr. Thorpe's door. From each carriage there descended gentlemen of highly respectable appearance, clothed in shining black garments, and wearing, for the most part, white cravats. One of these gentlemen carried in his hands a handsome silver inkstand, and another gentleman who followed him, bore a roll of glossy paper, tied round with a broad ribbon of sober purple hue. The roll contained an Address to Mr. Thorpe, eulogising his character in very affectionate terms—the inkstand was a Testimonial to be presented after the Address—and the gentlemen who occupied the three private carriages

were all eminent members of the religious society which Mr. Thorpe had served in the capacity of Secretary, and from which he was now obliged to secede in consequence of the precarious state of his health.

A small, orderly, and reverential assembly of idle people had collected on the pavement to see the gentlemen alight, to watch them go into the house, to stare at the inkstand, to wonder at the Address, to observe that Mr. Thorpe's page wore his best livery, and that Mr. Thorpe's housemaid had on new cap-ribbons and her Sunday gown. After the street door had been closed, and these various objects for popular admiration had disappeared, there still remained an attraction outside in the square, which eloquently addressed itself to the general ear. One of the footmen in attendance on the carriages, had collected many interesting particulars about the Deputation and the Testimonial, and while he related them in regular order to another footman anxious for information, the small and orderly public of idlers stood round about, and eagerly caught up any stray words explanatory of the ceremonies then in progress inside the house, which fell in their way.

One of the most attentive of these listeners was a swarthy-complexioned man with bristling whiskers and a scarred face, who had made one of the assembly on the pavement from the moment of its first congregating. He had been almost as much stared at by the people about him as the Deputation itself; and had been set down among them generally as a foreigner of the most outlandish kind,—but, in plain truth, he was English to the back-bone, being no other than Matthew Grice.

Mat's look, as he stood listening among his neighbours, was now just as quietly vigilant, his manner just as gruffly self-possessed, as usual. But it had cost him a hard struggle that morning, in the solitude of one of his longest and loneliest walks, to compose himself—or, in his favourite phrase, to “get to be his own man again.”

To better instructed minds, the startling resemblance between Zack's hair and “Arthur Carr's,” and even the last remarkable words which the lad himself had let drop after waking in the evening, would not have seemed such absolutely conclusive proofs as they appeared to the superstitious mind of Mat. From the moment when he threw the lock of hair into the fire, to the moment when he was now

loitering at Mr. Thorpe's door, *he* had never doubted, whatever others might have done, that the man who had been the ruin of his sister, and the man who was the nearest blood-relation of the comrade who shared his roof, and lay sick at that moment in his bed, were one and the same. Though he stood now, amid the casual street spectators, apparently as indolently curious as the most careless among them—looking at what they looked at, listening to what they listened to, and leaving the square when they left it,—he was resolved all the time to watch his first opportunity of entering Mr. Thorpe's house that very day ; resolved to investigate through all its ramifications, the secret which he had first discovered when the fragments of Zack's hair were playfully held up for him to look at in the deaf and dumb girl's hand.

The dispersion of the idlers on the pavement was accelerated, and the footman's imaginary description of the proceedings then in progress at Mr. Thorpe's, was cut short, by the falling of a heavy shower. The frost after breaking up had been succeeded that year by prematurely mild spring weather—April seemed to have come a month before its time.

Regardless of the rain, Mat walked slowly up and

down the streets round Baregrove Square, peering every now and then, from afar off, through the misty shower, to see if the carriages were still drawn up at Mr. Thorpe's door. The ceremony of presenting the Testimonial was evidently a protracted one; for the vehicles were long kept waiting for their owners. The rain had passed away—the sun had re-appeared—fresh clouds had gathered, and it was threatening a second shower, before the Deputation from the great Religious Society re-entered their vehicles and drove out of the square.

When they had quitted it, Mat entered it again. As he advanced and knocked at Mr. Thorpe's door, the clouds rolled up darkly over the sun, and the first warning drops of the new shower began to fall.

The servant hesitated about admitting him. He had anticipated that this sort of obstacle would be thrown in his way at the outset, and had provided against it in his own mind beforehand. "Tell your master," he said, "that his son is ill, and I've come to speak to him about it."

This message was delivered, and had the desired effect. Mat was admitted into the drawing-room immediately.

The chairs occupied by the members of the Deputation had not been moved away—the handsome silver inkstand was on the table—the Address, beautifully written on the fairest white paper, lay by it—Mr. Thorpe stood before the fire-place, and bending over towards the table, mechanically examined for the second time the signatures attached to the Address, while his strange visitor was being ushered up-stairs.

Mat's arrival had interrupted him just at the moment when he was going to Mrs. Thorpe's room, to describe to her the Presentation ceremony which she had been prevented by her cold from attending. He had stopped immediately, and the faint smile that was on his face had vanished from it, when the news of his son's illness reached him through the servant. But the hectic flush of triumph and pleasure which his interview with the Deputation had called into his cheeks, still coloured them as brightly as ever, when Matthew Grice entered the room.

"You have come, sir," Mr. Thorpe began, "to tell me——" He hesitated, stammered out another word or two, then stopped. Something in the expression of the dark and strange face that he saw

lowering at him under the black velvet skull-cap, suspended the words on his lips. In his present nervous enfeebled state, any sudden emotions of doubt or surprise, no matter how slight and temporary in their nature, always proved too powerful for his self-control, and betrayed themselves in his speech and manner painfully.

Mat said not a word to break the awkward silence. —Was he at that moment, in very truth, standing face to face with Arthur Carr? Could this man—so frail and meagre, with the narrow chest, the drooping figure, the effeminate pink tinge on his wan wrinkled cheeks—be indeed the man who had driven Mary to that last refuge, where the brambles and weeds grew thick, and the foul mud-pools stagnated, in the forgotten corner of the churchyard?

“You have come, sir,” resumed Mr. Thorpe, controlling himself by an effort which deepened the flush in his face, “to tell me news of my son, which I am not entirely unprepared for. I heard from him yesterday; and, though it did not strike me at first, I noticed on referring to his letter afterwards, that it was not in his own handwriting. My nerves are not very strong, and they have been tried—pleasurably, most pleasurably tried—already this morning,

by such testimonies of kindness, and affection, and sympathy, as it does not fall to the lot of many men to earn. May I beg you, if your news should be of an alarming nature (which God forbid!) to communicate it as —”

“My news is this,” Mat broke in: “Your son’s been hurt in the head, but he’s got over the worst of it now. He lives with me; I like him; and I mean to take care of him till he gets on his legs again. That’s my news about your son. But that’s not all I’ve got to say. I bring you news of somebody else.”

“Will you take a seat, and be good enough to explain yourself.”

They sat down at opposite sides of the table, with the Testimonial and the Address lying between them. The shower outside was beginning to fall at its heaviest. The splashing noise of the rain and the sound of running footsteps, as the few foot-passengers in the square made for shelter at the top of their speed, penetrated into the room during the pause of silence which ensued after they had taken their seats. Mr. Thorpe spoke first.

“May I inquire your name?” he said, in his lowest and calmest tones.

Mat did not seem to hear the question. He took up the Address from the table, looked at the list of signatures, and turned to Mr. Thorpe.

"I've been hearing about this," he said. "Are all them names there, the names of friends of yours?"

Mr. Thorpe looked a little astonished; but he answered after a moment of hesitation:—

"Certainly; the most valued friends I have in the world."

"Friends," pursued Mat, reading to himself the introductory sentence in the Address, "*who have put the most affectionate trust in you.*"

Mr. Thorpe began to look rather offended as well as rather astonished. "Will you excuse me he said coldly, "if I beg you to proceed to the business that has brought you here."


Mat placed the Address on the table again, immediately in front of him; and took a pencil from a tray with writing materials in it, which stood near at hand. "Friends '*who have put the most affectionate trust in you,*'" he repeated. "The name of one of them friends isn't here. It ought to be; and I mean to put it down."

As the point of his pencil touched the paper of

the Address, Mr. Thorpe started from his chair. "What am I to understand, sir, by this conduct?" he began haughtily, stretching out his hand to possess himself of the Address. Mat looked up with the serpent-glitter in his eyes, and the angry red tinge glowing in the scars on his cheek. "Sit down," he said, "I'm not quick at writing. Sit down, and wait till I'm done."

Mr. Thorpe's face began to look a little agitated. He took a step towards the fire-place, intending to ring the bell. "Sit down, and wait," Mat reiterated, in quick, fierce, but quietly uttered tones of command, rising from his own chair, and pointing peremptorily to the seat just vacated by the master of the house.

A sudden doubt crossed Mr. Thorpe's mind, and made him pause before he touched the bell. Could this man be in his right senses? His actions were entirely unaccountable—his words and his way of uttering them were alike strange—his scarred, scowling face looked hardly human at that moment. Would it be well to summon help?—No, worse than useless. Except the page, who was a mere boy, there were none but women servants in the house. When he remembered this, he sat down



again, and at the same moment, Mat began, clumsily and slowly, to write on the blank space beneath the last signature attached to the Address.

The sky was still darkening apace, the rain was falling heavily and more heavily, as he traced the final letter, and then handed the paper to Mr. Thorpe, bearing inscribed on it the name of MARY GRICE.

He looked at that name, and his face changed instantly—he sank down in the chair—one faint cry burst from his lips—then he was silent.

Low, stifled, momentary as it was, that cry proclaimed him to be the man. He was self-denounced by it even before he cowered down, shuddering in the chair, with both his hands pressed convulsively over his face.

Mat rose to his feet, and spoke; eyeing him pitilessly from head to foot: "Not a friend of the lot of 'em," he said, pointing down at the Address, "put such affectionate trust in you, as she did. When first I see her grave in the strange churchyard, I said I'd be even with the man who laid her in it. I'm here to-day to be even with *you*. Carr or Thorpe, whichever you call yourself, I know how you used her from first to last! *Her* father was

my father; *her* name is *my* name: you were *her* worst enemy three and twenty year ago; you are *my* worst enemy now. I'm her brother, Matthew Grice!"

As he said this, he involuntarily turned away his head; for the hands of the shuddering figure beneath him suddenly dropped, and the ghastly uncovered face looked up, with such a panic stare in the eyes, such a fearful quivering and distortion of all the features, that it tried even his firmness of nerve to look at it steadily. He went back to his chair, and sat down doggedly by the table, and was silent.

A low murmuring and moaning, amid which a few disconnected words made themselves faintly distinguishable, caused him to look round again. He saw that the ghastly face was once more hidden. He heard the disconnected words reiterated, always in the same stifled wailing tones. Now and then, a half finished phrase was audible from behind the withered hands, still clasped tight over the face. He heard such fragments of sentences as these:—"Have pity on my wife"—"accept the remorse of many years"—"spare me the disgrace ——"

After those four last words, he listened for no more. The merciless spirit was roused in him again the moment he heard them.

"Spare you the disgrace?" he repeated, starting to his feet. "Did you spare *her*?—Not you!"

Once more the hands dropped; once more the ghastly face slowly and horridly confronted him. But this time he never recoiled from it. There was no mercy in him—none in his looks, none in his tones—as he went on.

"What! it would disgrace you, would it? Then disgraced you shall be! You've kep' it a secret, have you? You shall tell that secret to every soul that comes about the house! You shall own Mary's disgrace, Mary's death, and Mary's child before every man who's put his name down on that bit of paper!—You shall, as soon as to-morrow if I like! You shall, if I have to bring the girl with me to make you; if I have to stand up, hand in hand along with her, here on your own —"

He stopped. The cowering figure was struggling upward from the chair; one of the withered hands slowly raised, was stretching itself out towards him; the panic-stricken eyes were growing less vacant, and were staring straight into his with a fearful meaning in their look; the pale lips were muttering rapidly—at first he could not tell what; then he succeeded in catching the two words, "Mary's

child?" murmured over and over again—quickly, faintly, incessantly reiterated, till he spoke in his turn.

"Yes," he said, pitiless as ever. "Yes: Mary's child. Your child. Haven't you seen her? Is it *that* you're staring and trembling about? Go and look at her: she lives within gunshot of you. Ask Zack's friend, the Painter Man, to show you the deaf and dumb girl he picked up among the horse-riders. Look here—look at this bracelet! Do you remember your own hair in it? The hands that brought up Mary's child, took that bracelet from Mary's pocket. Look at it again! Look at it close —"

Once more he stopped; for he saw the frail figure which had been feebly rising out of the chair, while he held up the Hair Bracelet, suddenly and heavily sink back into it—he saw the eyelids half close, and a great stillness pass over the face—he heard one deep-drawn breath; but no cry now, no moaning, no murmuring—no sound whatever, except the steady splash of the fast-falling rain on the pavement outside.

Dead?

A thought of Zack welled up into his heart, and troubled it.

He hesitated for a moment, then bent over the chair, and put his hand on the bosom of the deathly figure that reclined in it. A faint fluttering was still to be felt; and the pulse, when he tried that next, was beating feebly. It was not death he looked on now, but the swoon that is near neighbour to it.

For a minute or two, he stood with his eyes fixed on the white, calm face beneath him, thinking. "If me and Zack," he muttered, as he moved away, "hadn't been brothers together —" He left the sentence unfinished, took his hat quickly, and quitted the room.

In the passage down-stairs, he met one of the female servants, who opened the street door for him. "Your master wants you," he said, with a sort of effort, as he passed by her, and left the house.

CHAPTER XI.

MATTHEW GRICE'S REVENGE.

NEITHER looking to the right nor the left, neither knowing nor caring whither he went, Matthew Grice took the first turning he came to, which led him out of Baregrove Square. It happened to be the street communicating with the long suburban road, at the remote extremity of which Mr. Blyth lived. Mat followed this road mechanically, not casting a glance at the painter's abode when he passed it, and taking no notice of a cab, with luggage on the roof, which drew up, as he walked by, at the garden gate. If he had only looked round at the vehicle for a moment, he must have seen Valentine sitting inside it, and counting out the money for his fare.

But he still went on—straight on, looking aside at nothing. He fronted the wind and the clearing

quarter of the sky as he walked. The shower was now fast subsiding; and the first rays of returning sunlight, as they streamed through mist and cloud, fell tenderly and warmly on his face.

Though he did not show it outwardly, there was strife and trouble within him. The name of Zack was often on his lips, and he varied constantly in his rate of walking; now quickening, now slackening his pace at irregular intervals. It was evening before he turned back towards home—night, before he sat down again in the chair by young Thorpe's bedside.

"I'm a deal better to-night, Mat," said Zack, answering his first enquiries. "Blyth's come back: he's been sitting here with me a couple of hours or more. Where have you been to all day, you restless old Rough and Tough?" he continued, with something of his natural light-hearted manner returning already. "There's a letter come for you, by-the-by. The landlady said she would put it on the table in the front room."

Matthew found and opened the letter, which proved to contain two enclosures. One was addressed to Mr. Blyth; the other had no direction. The handwriting in the letter being strange to him, Mat looked first for the name at the end, and found that

it was *Thorpe*. "Wait a bit," he said, as Zack spoke again just then, "I want to read my letter. We'll talk after."

This is what he read :—

"Some hours have passed since you left my house. I have had time to collect a little strength and composure, and have received such assistance and advice as have enabled me to profit by that time. Now I know that I can write calmly, I send you this letter. Its object is not to ask how you became possessed of the guilty secret which I had kept from every one—even from my wife—but to offer you such explanation and confession as you have a right to demand from me. I do not cavil about that right—I admit that you possess it, without desiring further proof than your actions, your merciless words, and the Bracelet in your possession, have afforded me.

"It is fit you should first be told that the assumed name by which I was known at Dibbledean, merely originated in a foolish jest—in a wager that certain companions of my own age, who were accustomed to ridicule my fondness for botanical pursuits, and often to follow and disturb me when I went in search of botanical specimens, would not be able to trace and discover me in my country retreat. I went to

Dibbledean, because the neighbourhood was famous for specimens of rare Ferns, which I desired to possess; and I took my assumed name before I went, to help in keeping me from being traced and disturbed by my companions. My father alone was in the secret, and came to see me once or twice in my retirement. I have no excuse to offer for continuing to preserve my false name, at a time when I was bound to be candid about myself and my station in life. My conduct was as unpardonably criminal in this, as it was in greater things.

“Of what happened at Dibbledean I need not speak to *you*—even if shame and remorse would permit me to write about it.

“My stay at the cottage I had taken, lasted much longer than my father would have permitted, if I had not deceived him, and if he had not been much harassed at that time by unforeseen difficulties in his business as a foreign merchant. These difficulties arrived at last at a climax, and his health broke down under them. His presence, or the presence of a properly qualified person to represent him, was absolutely required in Germany, where one of his business-houses, conducted by an agent, was established. I was his only son; he had taken me as a

partner into his London house ; and had allowed me, on the plea of delicate health, to absent myself from my duties for months and months together, and to follow my favourite botanical pursuits just as I pleased. When, therefore, he wrote me word that great part of his property, and great part, consequently, of my sisters' fortunes, depended on my going to Germany (his own health not permitting him to take the journey), I had no choice but to place myself at his disposal immediately.

"I went away, being assured beforehand that my absence would not last more than three or four months at the most. I wrote to your sister constantly ; for though I had treated her dishonourably and wickedly, no thought of abandoning her had ever entered my heart : my dearest hope, at that time, was the hope of seeing her again. Not one of my letters was answered. I was detained in Germany beyond the time during which I had consented to remain there ; and, in the excess of my anxiety, I even ventured to write twice to your father. Those letters also remained unanswered. When I at last got back to England, I immediately sent a person on whom I could rely to Dibbledean, to make the inquiries which I dreaded to make myself. My

messenger was turned from your doors, with the fearful news of your sister's flight from home and of her death.

"It was then I first suspected that my letters had been tampered with. It was then, too, when the violence of my grief and despair had a little abated, that the news of your sister's flight inspired me, for the first time, with a suspicion of the consequence which had followed the commission of my sin. It may seem strange to you that this suspicion should not have occurred to me before. It would seem so no longer, perhaps, if I detailed to you the peculiar system of home education, by which my father, strictly and conscientiously, endeavoured to preserve me—as other young men are not usually preserved—from the moral contaminations of the world. But it would be useless to dwell on this now. No explanations can alter the events of the guilty and miserable past.

"Anxiously—though privately, and in fear and trembling—I caused such inquiries to be made as I hoped might decide the question whether the child existed or not. They were long persevered in, but they were useless—useless, perhaps, as I now think with bitter sorrow, because I trusted them to

others, and had not the courage to make them openly myself.

"Two years after that time I married, under circumstances not of an ordinary kind—what circumstances, you have, however, no claim to know. *That* part of my life is my secret and my wife's, and belongs to us alone.

"I have now dwelt long enough for your information on my own guilty share in the events of the Past. As to the Present and the Future, I have still a word or two left to say.

"You have declared that I shall expiate, by the exposure of my shameful secret before all my friends, the wrong your sister suffered at my hands. My life has been one long expiation for that wrong. My broken health, my altered character, my weary secret sorrows unpartaken and unconsolated, have punished me for many years past more heavily than you think. Do you desire to see me visited by more poignant sufferings than these? If it be so, you may enjoy the vindictive triumph of having already inflicted them. Your threats—which I firmly believe you are the man to execute to the letter—will force me, in a few hours, from the social world I have lived in, at the very time when the affection shown to me,

and the honour conferred on me by my dearest friends, have made that world most precious to my heart. They will force me from this, and from more—for they will force me from my home, at the moment when my son has affectionately entreated me to take him back to my fireside.

“These trials, heavy as they are, I am ready to endure, if, by accepting them humbly, I may be deemed to have made some atonement for my sin. But more, I have not the fortitude to meet. I cannot face the exposure with which you are about to overwhelm me. The anxiety, perhaps, I ought to say, the weakness of my life, has been to win and keep the respect of others. You are about, by disclosing the crime which dishonoured my youth, to deprive me of my good fame. I can let it go without a struggle, as part of the punishment that I have deserved; but I have not the courage to wait and see you take it from me. My own sensations tell me that I have not long to live, my own convictions assure me that I cannot fitly prepare myself for death, until I am far removed from worldly interests and worldly terrors—in a word, from the horror of an exposure, which I have deserved, but which, at the end of my weary life, is more than

I can endure. We have seen the last of each other in this world. To-night I shall be beyond the reach of your retaliation ; for to-night I shall be journeying to the retreat in which the short remainder of my life will be hidden from you, and from all men.

“It now only remains for me to advert to the two enclosures contained in this letter.

“The first is addressed to Mr. Blyth. I leave it to reach his hands through you, because I dare not, for very shame, communicate with him directly, as from myself. If what you said about my child be the truth—and I cannot dispute it—then, in my ignorance of her identity, in my estrangement from the house of her protector since she first entered it, I have unconsciously committed such an offence against Mr. Blyth, as no contrition can ever adequately atone for. Now indeed I feel how presumptuously merciless my bitter conviction of the turpitude of my own sin has made me towards what I deemed like sins in others. Now also I know, that, unless you have spoken falsely, I was guilty the very last time Mr. Blyth entered my house, of casting the shame of my own deserted child in the teeth of the very man who had nobly and tenderly

given her an asylum in his own home. The unutterable horror and anguish which only the bare suspicion of this inflicted on me, might well have been my death. I marvel even now at my own recovery from it.

“ You are free, if you wish it, to look at the letter to Mr. Blyth which I now entrust to you. Besides the expression of my shame, my sorrow, and my sincere repentance, it contains some questions, to which Mr. Blyth, in his Christian kindness, will, I doubt not, readily write answers. The questions only refer to the matter of the child’s identity; and the address I have written down at the end, is that of the house of business of my lawyer and agent in London. He will forward the document to me, and will then arrange with Mr. Blyth the manner in which a fit provision from my property may be best secured to his adopted child. He has deserved her love, and to him I gratefully and humbly leave her. For myself, I am not worthy even to look upon her face.

“ The second enclosure is meant for my son; and is to be delivered, in the event of your having already disclosed to him the secret of his father’s guilt. But, if you have not done this; if any mercy towards

me has entered into your heart, and pleads with it for pardon and for silence, then destroy the letter, and tell him that he will find a communication waiting for him at the house of my agent. He wrote to ask my pardon—he has it freely. Freely, in my turn, I hope to have his forgiveness for severities exercised towards him, which were honestly meant to preserve him betimes from ever falling as his father fell, but which I now fear were persevered in too hardly and too long. I have suffered for this error, as for others, heavily—more heavily, when he abandoned his home, than I should ever wish him to know. You said he lived with you, and that you were fond of him. Be gentle with him, now that he is ill, for his mother's sake.

“My hand grows weaker and weaker: I can write no more. In penitence, in grief, and in shame, I now ask your pardon—if you ever grant it me, then I ask also your prayers.”

With this the letter ended.

Matthew sat holding it open in his hand, for a little while. He looked round once or twice, at the letter from Mr. Thorpe to his son, which lay close by on the table—but did not destroy it; did not so much as touch it even.

Zack spoke to him before long from the inner room.

"I'm sure you must have done reading your letter by this time, Mat. I've been thinking, old fellow, of the talk we used to have, about going back to America together, and trying a little buffalo hunting and roaming about in the wilds. If my father takes me into favour again, and can be got to say Yes, I should so like to go with you, Mat. Not for too long, you know, because of my mother, and my friends over here. But a sea voyage, and a little scouring about in what you call the lonesome places, would do me such good! I don't feel as if I should ever settle properly to anything, till I've had my fling. I'm afraid I shan't do, till I've had the devil taken out of me, just as one takes it out of a horse, by a thundering good run. I wonder whether my father would let me go?"

"I know he would, Zack."

"You! How?"

"I'll tell you how another time. You shall have your run, Zack,—you shall have your heart's content along with me." As he said this, he looked again at Mr. Thorpe's letter to his son, and took it up in his hand this time.

"Oh! how I wish I was strong enough to start! Come in here, Mat, and let's talk about it."

"Wait a bit, and I will." Pronouncing those words, he rose from his chair, and dropped the letter into the fire.

"What can you be about all this time in there?" asked young Thorpe.

"Do you call to mind," said Mat, going into the bedroom, and sitting down by the lad's pillow. "Do you call to mind me saying, that I'd be brothers with you, when first us two come together? Well, Zack, I've been trying to be as good as my word."

"Trying? How do you mean? I don't understand, old fellow."

"Never mind: you'll make it out better some day. Let's talk about getting aboard ship, and going a buffalo-hunting, now."

They discussed the projected expedition, until Zack grew sleepy. As he fell off into a pleasant doze, Mat went back into the front-room; and, taking from the table Mr. Thorpe's letter to Mr. Blyth, left Kirk Street immediately for the painter's house.

It had occurred to Valentine to unlock his bureau twice since his return from the country, but on

neither occasion had he found it necessary to open that long narrow drawer at the back, in which he had secreted the Hair Bracelet years ago. He was consequently still totally ignorant that it had been taken away from him, when Matthew Grice entered the painting-room, and quietly put it into his hand.

Consternation and amazement so thoroughly overpowered him, that he suffered his visitor to lock the door against all intruders, and then to lead him peremptorily to a chair, without uttering a single word of inquiry or expostulation. All through the narrative, on which Mat now entered, he sat totally speechless, until Mr. Thorpe's letter was placed in his hands, and he was informed that Madonna was still to be left entirely under his own care. Then, for the first time, his cheeks showed symptoms of returning to their natural colour, and he exclaimed fervently, "Thank God! I shan't lose her after all! I only wish you had begun by telling me of that the moment you came into the room!"

Saying this, he began to read Mr. Thorpe's letter. When he had finished it, and looked up at Mat, the tears were in his eyes. "It's so shocking," said the kind-hearted painter, "that he should write to me

in such terms of humiliation as these, and doubt if I can forgive him, when he has a right to my everlasting gratitude for not breaking my heart by asking me to part with our darling child—for I must call her ours still. They never met—he has never, never, seen her face,” continued Valentine, in lower and fainter tones. “She always wore her veil down by my wish, when we went out, and our walks were generally into the country, instead of town way. I only once remember seeing him coming towards us ; and then I crossed the road with her, knowing we were not on terms. There’s something dreadful about the father and daughter living so near each other, yet being—if one may say so—so far, so very far apart. It’s dreadful to think of that—more dreadful still to think of its having been *her* hand which held up the hair for you to look at, and *her* little innocent action which led to the shocking discovery of who her father really was ! ”

“Do you ever mean to let her know as much about it as we do ? ” asked Matthew.

The look of dismay began to appear again in Valentine’s face. “Have you told Zack, yet ? ” he inquired, nervously and eagerly.

“No,” said Mat ; “and don’t *you* ! When Zack’s

on his legs again, he's going to take a voyage, and get a season's hunting along with me in the wild country over the water. I'm as fond of the lad, as if he was a bit of my own flesh and blood. I cottoned to him when he hit out so hearty for me at the singing-shop — we've been brothers together ever since. I've spared Zack's father for Zack's sake; and I don't ask no more reward for it, than to take the lad a hunting for a season or two along with me. When he comes back here, and we say Good-bye, I'll tell him all what's happened; but I won't risk bringing so much as a cross look into his eyes now, by dropping a word to him of what's passed betwixt his father and me."

Although this speech excited no little surprise and interest in Valentine's mind, it did not succeed in suspending the anxieties which had been awakened in him by Matthew's preceding question, and which he now began to feel the necessity of confiding to Mrs. Blyth—his grand counsellor in all difficulties, and unfailing comforter in all troubles. "Do you mind waiting here?" he said, "while I go upstairs, and break this strange and fearful news to my wife. I should wish to be guided entirely by her advice in meeting the very serious difficulty in relation to the

poor dear child, which you have just suggested to me. Do you mind waiting?"

No: Matthew would willingly wait. Hearing this, Mr. Blyth left the room directly.

He remained away a long time, and when he came back, his face did not seem to have gained in composure during his absence.

"My wife has told me of a discovery," he said, "which her intimate sympathy with our adopted daughter enabled her to make some time since. I have been both astonished and distressed at hearing of it. But I need say no more on the subject to you, than that this discovery has at once decided us to confide nothing to Madonna—to Mary, I ought to say—until Zack has got well again and has left England. When I heard just now, from you, of his projected voyage, I must confess I saw many decided objections to it. They have all been removed by what my wife has told me. I heartily agree with her that the best thing Zack can do is to make the trip he proposes. You are willing to take care of him; and I honestly believe that we may safely trust him with you."

A great and serious difficulty being thus disposed of, Valentine found leisure to pay some attention to

minor things. Among other questions which he now asked, was one relating to the Hair Bracelet, and to the manner in which Matthew had become possessed of it. He was answered by the frankest confession, a confession which tried even *his* kindly and forbearing disposition to the utmost, as he listened to it; and which drew from him, when it was ended, some of the strongest terms of reproach that had ever passed his lips. Mat listened till he had done; then, taking his hat to go, muttered a few words of rough apology, which Valentine's good-nature induced him to accept, almost as soon as they were spoken. "We must let bygones be bygones," said the painter. "You have been candid with me, at last, at any-rate; and, in recognition of that candour, I say 'Goodnight, Mr. Grieve,' as a friend of yours still."

When Mat returned to Kirk Street, the landlady came out of her little parlour to tell him of a visitor who had been to the lodgings in his absence. An elderly lady looking very pale and ill, had asked to see young Mr. Thorpe, and had prefaced the request by saying that she was his mother. Zack was then asleep, but the lady had been taken up stairs to see him in bed—had stooped over him, and kissed him—

and had then gone away again, hastily, and in tears. Matthew's face grew grave as he listened, but he said nothing when the landlady had done, except a word or two charging her not to mention to Zack what had happened when he woke. It was plain that Mrs. Thorpe had been told her husband's secret, and that she had lovingly devoted herself to him, as comforter and companion to the last.

When the doctor paid his regular visit to the invalid, the next morning, he was called on immediately for an answer to the important question of when Zack would be fit to travel. After due consideration and careful inspection of the injured side of the patient's head, he replied that in a month's time the lad might safely go on board ship; and that the sea-voyage proposed would do more towards restoring him to perfect health and strength, than all the tonic medicines that all the doctors in England could prescribe.

Matthew might have found the month's inaction to which he was now obliged to submit for Zack's sake, rather tedious, but for the opportune arrival in Kirk Street of a professional visitor from Dibble-dean. Though his client had ungratefully and entirely forgotten him, Mr. Tatt had not by any

means forgotten his client, but had, on the contrary, attended to his interests with unremitting resolution and assiduity. He had discovered that Mat was entitled, under his father's will, to no less a sum than two thousand pounds, if his identity could be properly established. To effect this result was now, therefore, the grand object of Mr. Tatt's ambition. He had the prospect, not only of making a little money, but of establishing a famous reputation in Dibbledean, if he succeeded—and, by dint of perseverance, he ultimately did succeed. He carried Mat about to all sorts of places, insisted on his signing all sorts of papers and making all sorts of declarations, and ended by accumulating such a mass of evidence before the month was out, that Mr. Nawby, as executor to "the late Joshua Grice," declared himself convinced of the claimant's identity. Mat on being informed of this, ordered Mr. Tatt, after first deducting the amount of his bill from the forthcoming legacy, to draw him out such a legal form as might enable him to settle his property forthwith on another person. When Mr. Tatt asked to be furnished with the name of this person, he was told to write "Martha Peckover."

"Mary's child has got you to look after her, and

money enough from her father to keep her," said Mat, as he put the signed instrument into Valentine's hands. "When Martha Peckover's old and past her work, she may want a bank-note or two to fall back on. Give her this, when I'm gone—and say she earned it from Mary's brother, the day she stopped and suckled Mary's child for her by the roadside."

The day of departure drew near. Zack rallied so rapidly, that he was able, a week before it arrived, to go himself and fetch the letter from his father which was waiting for him at the Agent's office. It assured him, briefly, but very kindly, of the forgiveness which he had written to ask—referred him to the man of business for particulars of the allowance granted to him, while he pursued his studies in the Art, or otherwise occupied himself—urged him always to look on Mr. Blyth as the best friend and counsellor that he could ever have—and ended by engaging him to write often about himself and his employments, to his mother; sending his letters to be forwarded through the Agent. When Zack, hearing from this gentleman that his father had left the house in Baregrove Square, desired to know what had occasioned the change of residence, he was only

informed that the state of Mr. Thorpe's health had obliged him to seek perfect retirement and repose; and that there were reasons at present for not mentioning the place of his retreat to any one, which it was not deemed expedient for his son to become acquainted with.

The day of departure arrived. In the morning, by Valentine's advice, Zack wrote to his mother, only telling her, in reference to his proposed trip, that he was about to travel to improve and amuse himself, in the company of a friend, of whom Mr. Blyth approved. While he was thus engaged, the painter had a private interview with Matthew Grice, and very earnestly charged him to remember his responsibilities towards his young companion. Mat answered briefly and characteristically: "I told you I was as fond of him as if he was a bit of my own flesh and blood. If you don't believe I shall take care of him, after that—I can't say nothing to make you."

Both the travellers were taken up into Mrs. Blyth's room to say Farewell. It was a sad parting. Zack's spirits had not been so good as usual, since the day of his visit to the Agent's—and the other persons assembled were all more or less affected in an

unusual degree by the approaching separation. Madonna had looked ill and anxious—though she would not own to having anything the matter with her—for some days past. But now, when she saw the parting looks exchanged around her, the poor girl's agitation got beyond her control, and became so painfully evident that Zack wisely and considerably hurried over the farewell scene. He went out first. Matthew followed him to the landing—then stopped—and suddenly retraced his steps. He entered the room again, and took his sister's child by the hand once more; bent over her as she stood pale and in tears before him; and kissed her on the cheek. "Tell her some day, that me and her mother was playmates together," he said to Mrs. Blyth, as he turned away to join Zack on the stairs.

Valentine accompanied them to the ship. When they shook hands together, he said to Matthew. "Zack has engaged to come back in a year's time. Shall we see *you* again with him?"

Mat took the painter aside, without directly answering him. "If ever you go to Bangbury," he whispered, "look into the churchyard, in the dark corner amongst the trees. There's a bit of walnut-wood planking put up now at the place where

she's buried; and it would be a comfort to me to know that it was kep' clean and neat. I should take it kind of you if you'd give it a brush or two with your hand when you're near it—for I shall never see the place myself, no more."

* * * *

Sadly and thoughtfully, Valentine returned alone to his own house. He went up at once to his wife's room.

As he opened the door, he started, and stopped on the threshold; for he saw Madonna sitting on the couch by her adopted mother, with her face hidden on Mrs. Blyth's bosom, and her arms clasped tight round Mrs. Blyth's neck.

"Have you ventured to tell her all, Lavvie?" he asked.

Mrs. Blyth was not able to speak in answer—she looked at him with tearful eyes, and bowed her head.

Valentine lingered at the door for a moment—then softly closed it, and left them together.

CLOSING CHAPTER.

A YEAR AND A HALF AFTERWARDS.

It is sunset after a fine day in August, and Mr. Blyth is enjoying the evening breeze in "Lavvie's Drawing Room."

Besides the painter and his wife, and Madonna, two visitors are present, who occupy both the spare beds in the house. One is Mrs. Thorpe, the other Mrs. Peckover; and they have been asked to become Valentine's guests, to assist at the joyful ceremony of welcoming Zack to England on his return from the wilds of America. He has outstayed his year's leave of absence by nearly six months; and his appearance at Mr. Blyth's has become an event of daily, or more properly, of hourly expectation.

There is a sad and significant change in Mrs. Thorpe's dress. She wears the widow's cap and

weeds. It is nearly seven months since her husband died, in the remote Welsh village to which he retired on leaving London. With him, as with many other confirmed invalids, Nature drooped to her final decay gradually and wearily ; but his death was painless, and his mental powers remained unimpaired to the end. One of the last names that lingered lovingly on his lips—after he had bade his wife farewell—was the name of his absent son.

Mrs. Thorpe sits close to Mrs. Blyth, and talks to her in low, gentle tones. The kind black eyes of the painter's wife are brighter than they have been for many a long year past, and the clear tones of her voice—cheerful always—have a joyous sound in them now. Ever since the first days of the Spring season, she has been gaining so greatly in health and strength, that the "favourable turn" has taken place in her malady, which was spoken of as "possible" by the doctors long ago, at the time of her first sufferings. She has several times, for the last fortnight, been moved from her couch for a few hours to a comfortable seat near the window ; and if the fine weather still continues, she is to be taken out, in a day or two, for an airing in an invalid chair.

The prospect of this happy event, and the pleasant expectation of Zack's return, have made Valentine more gaily talkative and more nimbly restless than ever. As he skips discursively about the room at this moment, talking of all sorts of subjects and managing to mix Art up with every one of them ; dressed in the old jaunty frock-coat with the short tails, and the famous tight trousers which rigidly follow his Form, and which Trimbo the Tailor can never cut out properly, except when he is drunk ; he looks, if possible, rather younger, plumper, rosier, and brisker than when he was first introduced to the reader. It is wonderful when people are really youthful at heart, to see how easily the Girdle of Venus fits them, and how long they contrive to keep it on, without ever wearing it out !

Mrs. Peckover, arrayed in festively-flaring cap-ribbons, sits close to the window to get all the air she can, and tries to make more of it by fanning herself with the invariable red cotton pocket-handkerchief to which she has been all her life attached. In bodily circumference she has not lost an inch of rotundity ; suffers, in consequence, considerably, from the heat ; and talks to Mr. Blyth with parenthetical pantings, which do not reflect much credit

on the cooling influence of the breeze, or the ventilating properties of the pocket-handkerchief fan.

Madonna sits opposite to her at the window—as cool and pretty a contrast as can be imagined, in her white muslin dress, and light rose-coloured ribbons. She is looking at Mrs. Peckover, and smiling every now and then at the comically languishing faces made by that excellent woman, to express to “little Mary” the extremity of her sufferings from the heat. The whole length of the window-sill is occupied by an Æolian harp—one of the many presents which Valentine’s portrait painting expeditions have enabled him to offer to his wife. Madonna’s hand is resting lightly on the box of the harp; for by touching it in this way, she becomes sensible to the influence of its louder and higher notes when the rising breeze draws them out. This is the only pleasure she can derive from music; and it is always, during the summer and autumn evenings, one of the amusements that she enjoys in Mrs. Blyth’s room.

Mrs. Thorpe, in the course of her conversation with Mrs. Blyth, has been reminded of a letter to one of her sisters, which she has not yet completed, and goes to her own room to finish it—Valentine

running to open the door for her, with the nimblest juvenile gallantry, then returning to the window and addressing Mrs. Peckover. "Hot as ever, eh? Shall I get you one of Lavvie's fans?" says Mr. Blyth.

"No thank'ee, sir; I ain't quite melted yet," answers Mrs. Peckover. "But I'll tell you what I wish you would do for me. I wish you would read me Master Zack's last letter. You promised, you know, sir."


"And I would have performed my promise before, Mrs. Peckover, if Mrs. Thorpe had not been in the room. There are passages in the letter, which it might revive very painful remembrances in her to hear. Now she is not here, however, I have not the least objection to read, if you are ready to listen."

Saying this, Valentine takes a letter from his pocket. Madonna recognising it, asks by a sign if she may look over his shoulder and read it for the second time. The request is granted immediately. Mr. Blyth makes her sit on his knee, puts his arm round her waist, and begins to read aloud as follows :

"MY DEAR VALENTINE.—Although I am writing

to you to announce my return, I cannot say that I take up my pen in good spirits. It is not so long since I picked up my last letters from England that told me of my father's death. But besides that, I have had a heavy trial to bear, in hearing the dreadful secret, which you all kept from me when it was discovered; and afterwards in parting, I am afraid for ever, from Matthew Grice.

“What I felt when I knew the secret, and heard why Mat and all of you had kept it from me, I may be able to tell you—but I cannot and dare not write about it. You may be interested to hear how my parting with Matthew happened; and I will relate it to you, as well as I can. You know, from my other letters, all the glorious hunting and riding we have had, and the thousands of miles of country we have been over, and the wonderful places we have seen. Well, Bahia (the place I now write from) has been the end of our travels. It was here I told Mat of my father's death: and he directly agreed with me that it was my duty to go home, and comfort my poor, dear mother, by the first ship that sailed for England. After we had settled that, he said he had something serious to tell me, and asked me to go with him, northward, half a day's



march along the sea-coast; saying we could talk together quietly as we went along. I saw that he had got his rifle over his shoulder, and his baggage at his back; and thought it odd—but he stopped me from asking any questions, by telling me from beginning to end, all that you and he knew about my father, before we left England. I was at first so shocked and amazed by what I heard, and then had so much to say to him about it, that our half day's march, by the time we had got to the end of it, seemed to me to have hardly lasted as long as an hour.

“He stopped, though, at the place he had fixed on; and held out his hand to me, and said: ‘I’ve done my duty by you, Zack, as brother should by brother. The time’s come at last for us two to say Good-bye. You’re going back over the sea to your friends, and I’m going inland by myself on the tramp.’ I’d heard him talk of our parting in this way before, but had never thought it would really take place; and I tried hard, as you may well imagine, to make him change his mind, and sail for England with me. But it was useless. ‘No, no, Zack,’ he said, ‘I’m not fit for the sort of life you’re going back to lead. I’ve given it a trial, and a hard and bitter one it’s been to me. Except Mary’s child,

my kin are all dead; and my own country has grown strange to me. I begun life on the tramp; and on the tramp I shall end it. Good-bye, Zack; I shall think of you, when I light my fire and cook my bit of victuals without you, in the lonesome places to-night. Come, let's cut it as short as we can, or we shan't part as men should. God bless you, lad, and all them you're going back to see.' Those were his last words—I shall never forget them as long as I live.

"After he had walked a few yards inland, he turned round and waved his hand—then went on, and never turned again. I sat down on the sand-hillock where we had said Good-bye, and burst out crying. What with the dreadful secret he had been telling me as we came along, and then the parting when I didn't expect it, all I had of the man about me gave way somehow in a moment. And I sat alone crying and sobbing on the sand-hillock, with the surf roaring miles out at sea behind me, and the great plain before, with Matthew walking over it alone on his way to the mountains beyond.

"When I had had time to get ashamed of myself for crying, and had got my eyesight clear again, he was already far away from me. I ran to the top of

the highest hillock, and watched him over the plain—a desert, without a shrub to break the miles and miles of flat ground spreading away to the mountains. I watched him, as he got smaller and smaller—I watched till he got a mere black speck—till I was doubtful whether I still saw him or not—till I was certain at last, that the great vacancy of the plain had swallowed him up from sight.

“My heart was very heavy, Valentine, as I went back to the town by myself. It is sometimes heavy still; for though I think much of my mother, and of my sister—whom you have been so kind a father to, and whose affection it is such a new happiness to me to have the prospect of soon returning—I think occasionally of dear old Mat, too, and have my melancholy moments when I remember that he and I are not going back to England together.

“I hope you will think me improved by my long trip—I mean in behaviour, as well as health. I have seen much, and learnt much, and thought much—and I hope I have really profited and altered for the better during my absence. It is such a pleasure to think I am really going home—”

Here Mr. Blyth stops abruptly and closes the

After, for Mrs. Thorpe re-enters the room. "The rest is only about when he expects to be back," whispers Valentine to Mrs. Peckover. "By my calculations," he continues, raising his voice and turning towards Mrs. Thorpe; "by my calculations (which, not having a mathematical head, I don't boast of, mind, as being infallibly correct), Zack, assuming that he sails at the time he says he will, is likely, extremely likely, I should say, to be here in about——"

"Hush! hush! hush!" cries Mrs. Peckover, jumping up with incredible agility at the window, and clapping her hands in a violent state of excitement. "Hush! hush! hush! don't talk about when he will be here—*here he is*: He's come in a cab—he's got out into the garden—he sees me. Welcome back, Master Zack, welcome back! Hooray! hooray!" here Mrs. Peckover forgets her company-manners and waves the red cotton handkerchief out of the window in an irrepressible ecstasy of triumph.

Zack's hearty laugh is heard outside—then his quick step on the stairs—then the door opens and he comes in with his beaming sunburnt face, healthier and heartier than ever. His first embrace

is for his mother, his second for Madonna; and, after he has greeted every one else cordially, he goes back to those two, and Mr. Blyth is glad to see that he sits down between them and takes their hands gently and affectionately in his.

"That's right, Zack!" says Valentine, looking at him with glistening eyes. "That's the way to begin life again in good and hearty earnest! We've had many pleasant hours, Lavvie, in the course of our lives," continues Mr. Blyth, taking his favourite place by the side of his wife's couch; "but I do really think this is the happiest hour of all. Welcome, once more, my dear boy!—a thousand times welcome back to friends and home!"

THE END.





